SPORT IN THE OLDEN TIME

BY

SIR WALTER GILBEY, BART.

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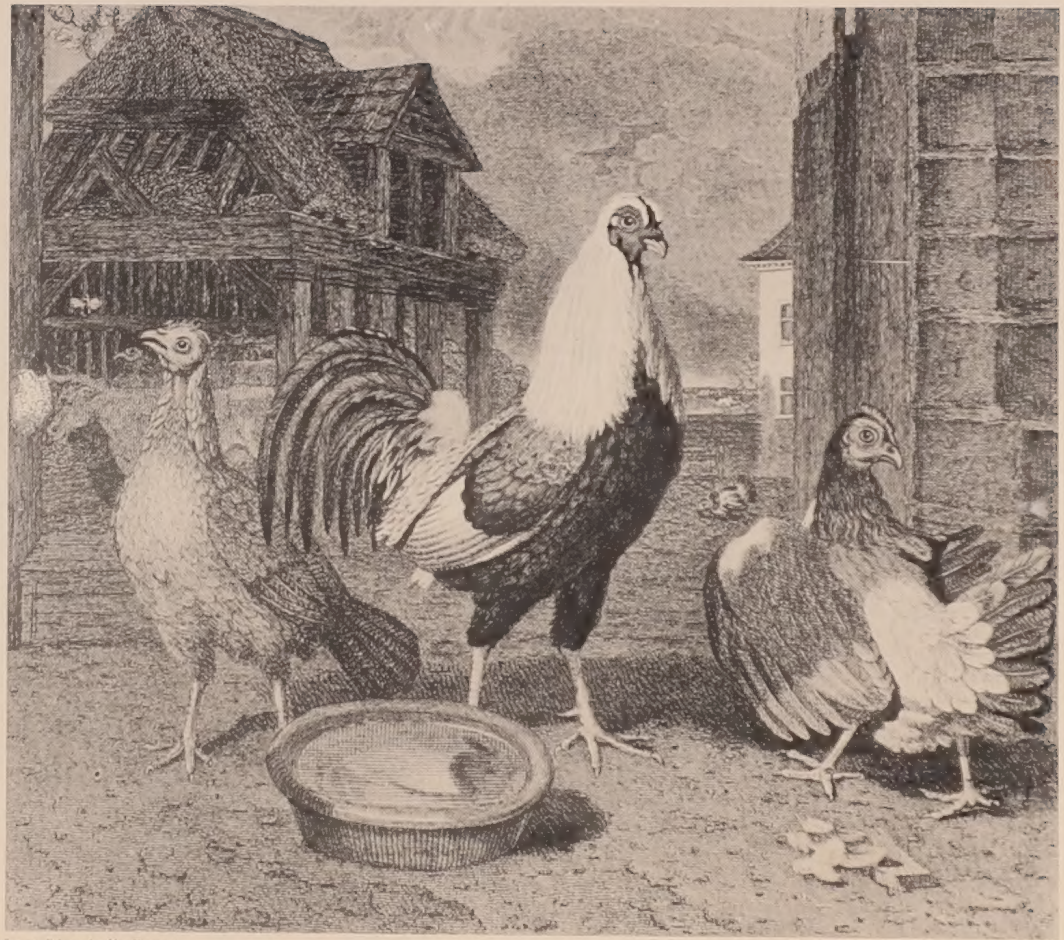

Lambert Marshall, *Pinxt.* J. Romney, *Sculpsit*

Portraits of a rich Birchen Duckwing Cock which fought many battles and won a Welsh Main of 16 Cocks, Duckwing Hen and Wheaten Hen. This picture formed the prize for a Welsh Main at Newmarket in February, 1832—*The Sporting Magazine of 1830*

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INTRODUCTION

No pastime has ever held in England the position which was held for centuries by cock-fighting.

Cock-fighting was, to quote the title of an old treatise, "the pleasure of Princes"; it was practised by the highest of the nobility and by the humblest peasant. Love of "cocking" permeated society from top to bottom

It is unpleasant to dwell on the shortcomings of our ancestors, more especially upon a defect which gave zest to their amusements; for the institution whose history is traced in the following pages was hardly less cruel than bull-baiting and bear-baiting

The interest this now discredited institution has for us in modern days arises from its former popularity. There is no feature of social history which sheds so much light upon our ancestors' manners, customs and ways of thought

It is difficult for us to enter into the feelings of men who indulged in cock-fighting and framed such rules as those which governed the conduct of a "main"

Some of these rules betray a callousness almost incredible ; but they express the mental attitude of a rude age towards physical suffering. The rules are what might be expected of the times in which cocking flourished

Men do not realise how far they have travelled on the road to humanity within the last hundred and fifty years—and a hundred and fifty years is a short chapter in the history of a nation

Our laws show the change that has gradually come over us. On the 6th April, 1763, Anne Bedingfield was burned alive for the murder of her husband under the savage law against "petty treason"

Nowadays the death penalty is seldom inflicted upon a murderess however inhuman her crime. A hundred years ago and less the appalling condition of our prisons and asylums, and the extraordinary combination of brutality and neglect with which prisoners and the insane were treated make us wonder whether we are reading of days when the fathers of many among us were alive

When men were thus indifferent to the sufferings of their fellow creatures it was not singular that they should be callous where the brute creation was concerned; and perhaps a

case might have been made out for organised cock-fighting in the days before artificial spurs came into use

It is not necessary to dwell upon the case for the defence; it may be admitted that it is in the nature of cocks to fight, and that if a bird did not choose to fight he could not be forced to do it; but nobody has yet ventured to argue that arming cocks with metal spurs was a natural proceeding

The case of the fighting cock was at least a degree less unenviable than that of the baited bull. His first fight was very often his last, and if injured he was carefully nursed and tended

The unfortunate bull or bear dragged from fair to fair covered with neglected wounds from the teeth of the dogs set against him lived a life of torture from which only age or decrepitude released him

The number of words and phrases in daily use prove in striking fashion the place cocking occupied in the thoughts of the people

No amusement, no occupation has furnished the English language with so many current expressions. "Cocky"; "cocksure" "cock of the walk"; "that beats cock-fighting"; "live like fighting cocks" bear their origin on the face of them

We use some phrases unconscious of their source, but their origin is not less clear: "battle royal" still describes a general quarrel; "pounded" is still used on the turf in its old cockpit sense of hopelessly beaten

No cocking phrase is in more frequent use than "pit against." To "show a clean pair of heels" is referable to the craven cock which ran away without striking a blow and showed his heels (*i.e.* spurs) unstained with blood

The common way of expressing a young man's fitness for the Army or the Navy is to say he is "cut out" for it, an echo of the cock-pit where a bird was "cut out" or clipped for battle

To "die game" is surely a cocking phrase. In Mexico and Arizona, and no doubt in other parts of cattle-raising America, a cowboy is said to be "heeled" when he carries arms, as the fighting cock was said to be "heeled" when the spurs, or "heels" were put on him for battle

Having regard, then, to the place formerly held by cock-fighting among the English people, it has seemed worth while to compile this brief sketch of its history

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SPORT IN THE OLDEN TIMES

Early Cock-fighting

Cock-fighting is said by old writers to have been introduced into this country by the Romans, who had adopted it from the Greeks

It is hardly worth while pausing to enquire whether this view of the origin of English cock-fighting is correct or not; but it may be pointed out that cock-fighting has been practised from the very earliest times among people who never came under either Greek or Roman influence

Cornish tradition maintains that the Phœnicians, who came to obtain supplies of tin, introduced cock-fighting into that part of England, and claims for Cornwall the distinction attaching to the earliest home of English cocking

It is highly probable that the natural pugnacity of cocks afforded amusement to the inhabitants of this country long before the Phœnician traders discovered Britain or the Romans invaded us

Shrovetide Cocking

The earliest reference to cock-fighting in England occurs in William Fitzstephen's Latin tract describing London and the amusements of the citizens in the time of King Henry II (1154-1189). This old writer refers to the cocking on Shrove Tuesday which remained a schoolboy institution for centuries

"Every year also at Shrove Tuesday . . . . the schoolboys do bring cocks of the game to their masters and all the forenoon they delight themselves in cock-fighting; after dinner all the youths go into the fields to play at the ball"

It is easy to understand why cock-fighting should have been considered a peculiarly appropriate amusement for schoolboys. During the ages when soldiers met hand to hand in battle, personal courage and indifference to pain and injury were held in the esteem those qualities deserve: and the unflinching valour of the game-cock, which would fight to his last gasp, furnished an object lesson by which youth might profit

Various records exist to throw sidelights on the manner in which the sport was conducted in former days

Queen Elizabeth granted statutes for Hartlebury Grammar School which provided that

"The school master and ushers shall and may have use and take the profits of all such cock-fights . . . as be commonly used in schools"

The Congleton (Cheshire) Town accounts for the year 1601 show, for example, that John Magge was paid fourpence for "dressing" the school at the great cock-fight

Mr. William Henderson* says that the master of Sedbergh Grammar School in Yorkshire was entitled to receive fourpence halfpenny a year from each boy on Shrove Tuesday, this being the levy to buy fighting cocks; the practice continued until the days of the Regency

The regulations of the Kendal Grammar School made the establishment free to all boys resident in the parish "excepting a voluntary payment of a cock penny as aforetime at Shrovetide"

At Grange-over-Sands, custom required the parents of the boys at the grammar school to contribute according to social standing; the "cock pence" thus given at Shrovetide in the early years of the last century ranged from half a crown to five pounds

* *Folklore of the Northern Counties of England* (1879).

The school master directed the battles in the school or in the pit attached, and the bodies of the slain were his perquisite : in this connection it may be noticed that the meat of a cock killed in fight was held in particular esteem for the table. The school master also claimed as his perquisite any cock which refused battle when put on the pit : this bird was called a "fugee," and we may safely conjecture had his neck wrung without compunction

The "cock pence" sometimes amounted to a considerable sum ; at Applecross, Rosshire, in 1792, the minister was the school master and the "cock-fight dues" were equal to a quarter's payment for each scholar *

Henry Miller the celebrated geologist, gives † a description of cock-fighting at the Cromarty Grammar School which he attended. Miller was born in the year 1802 ; his remarks therefore apply to the period 1812-15 or thereabout

> "The school, like almost all other grammar schools in Scotland, had its yearly cock-fight, preceded by two holidays and a half during which the boys occupied themselves in collecting and bringing up the cocks. And

* *Statistical Account of Scotland*, Sir John Sinclair (1792).

† *My Schools and School Masters*

such always was the array of fighting birds mustered on the occasion that the day of the festival from morning till night used to be spent in fighting out the battles

"For weeks after, the school floor retained its deeply stained blotches of blood, and the boys would be full of exciting narratives regarding the glories of gallant birds who had continued to fight until their eyes had been pecked out, or who in the moment of victory had dropped dead in the cock-pit"

Shrove Tuesday cocking by schoolboys was not a minor feature of the sport. It was an institution that contributed much to obtain for cock-fighting the place it held for centuries among our ancestors. The taste acquired by boys in their schooldays remained with them throughout life, and the knowledge acquired in early years made the cock-pit the natural resort of men

Cock-fighting in Plantagenet Times

There is dearth of information about cocking for many years after Fitzstephen wrote. The next mention of it occurs in a letter written by King Edward III to the Sheriffs of London, on 12th June 1365 *

* *History of London.* By Wm. Maitland, F.S.A. (1739).

This letter called upon the City authorities to forbid by Proclamation various pastimes of which cock-fighting was one ; the object being to compel all able-bodied men "at leisure times on holidays to . . . learn and exercise the art of shooting" with long-bow* and cross-bow

Some authorities assume that this, and later prohibitions, indicate disapproval of cocking as a sport, but this assumption will not stand ; cock-fighting was placed in the category with hand-ball, foot-ball, bandy-ball, hockey, and the throwing of weights as an amusement which distracted attention from the citizen's very necessary duty of learning to shoot

Cock-fighting in Tudor Times

As may be supposed, not everyone considered cock-fighting a suitable amusement for school-boys. When Dr. John Colet, chaplain to Henry VIII, established and endowed St. Paul's School in 1509, he included among the "Ordinances and Appointments" of the new school one in these terms : "That the scholars use no cock-fighting nor Riding about of

* The number of ancient yews, the wood of which was principally used for making long-bows, remaining in the churchyards of England and Wales, shows the importance attached to this tree in ancient times ; and reflects the importance attached to skill with the long-bow

Victory nor Disputing at St. Bartholomew's; which are but foolish babbling and loss of time" *

Dr. Colet was a divine of great force of character and held views out of harmony with the spirit of his age. When, in 1513, England was making active preparation for war with France, he asserted that "an unjust peace was better than a just war"; and had the courage to preach a sermon in this sense before the King and his Court

There can be no doubt that adults as well as youths passed at the cock-pit time that might have been better employed; in 1570, the Court of Aldermen in London, being greatly alarmed by a visitation of the plague ordered that all "masterless men" caught frequenting places of common assembly including gaming houses, cock-pits and bowling alleys should be banished from the City

The wording of this ordinance points to the existence of public cock-pits in London. The only place of the kind to which definite reference is made was the cock-pit at Westminster. This is said to have been built by Henry VIII (1509-1547)

* *History of London.* By Wm. Maitland, F.S.A.

Royal Cock-pits

George Wilson in the earliest known treatise on the sport * says that Henry VIII

> "did take such pleasure and wonderful delight in the cocks of the game that he caused a most sumptuous and stately cock pit to be erected in Westminster, wherein His Majesty might disport himself with cock fighting among his most noble and loving subjects who in like manner did affect that pastime so well, and conceived so good an opinion of it . . . that they caused cock pits to be made in many cities, boroughs and towns throughout the whole realm"

In 1619, William Sixth Earl of Derby made a cock-pit at Chester in a garden under St. Johns. Many pits in various parts of the country were built by the local authority of the town which wanted one: such were known as "Corporation Cock-pits"

Henry VIII took part in many field sports and was much addicted to gaming; but it is a curious fact that his *Privy Purse Expenses*, † covering the period November 1529 to December 1532, contain no single mention of money

* *The Commendation of Cocks and Cock-fighting.* By George Wilson of Wretton in Norfolk (1607).

† By Sir H. N. Nicolas

paid in connection with cock-fighting. There are numerous entries of sums paid into "the hand of the King's Grace" for gaming: his losses at dice, cards, "tables," shovelboard, "Pope July game," and shooting matches are recorded; the sums paid to falconers, pheasant breeders, to horse trainers and the riding boys of the royal racing stables are set down, but there is no mention of cocking

The absence of payments in connection with cocking or the cock-pit seems to indicate that Henry VIII did not take any personal part in the sport

Before going further it is well to point out that there were three cock-pits at Westminster at different times. The earliest, that attributed to Henry VIII, was part of Whitehall Palace, and occupied the site of the present official residence of the first Lord of the Treasury—No. 10 Downing Street. The building was used as a theatre by King Henry VIII's successors—Queen Elizabeth, King James I and King Charles I

In those days the street we know as Whitehall did not exist; the grounds of Whitehall Palace were bounded by the Thames on the one side, and on the other lay the Park, on whose northern side stood St. James's Palace

The cock-pit gave its name to a whole group of buildings including residential quarters. When, in 1683, Princess Anne of York was married to Prince George of Denmark, the uncle of the bride, Charles II, gave her "that adjunct of Whitehall which was called the cock-pit" as a residence *

Whitehall Palace was destroyed by fire in 1697, and a Privy Council room was built on the site of the buildings which had included the old cock-pit

It is an interesting example of the tenacity of names that Treasury papers for over a hundred years after this Privy Council room was built were often headed "The Cock-pit," while in popular language the Privy Council itself was sometimes called "The Cock-pit" so recently as the year 1806 †

The Westminster cock-pit was at the north-western end of Dartmouth Street; this was the scene of battles for a long period of years until 1816, when it was pulled down. The "Cock-pit steps" out of Birdcage Walk remain to indicate the site. The ground whereon the Westminster cock-pit stood was owned by Christ's Hospital; and on the day the lease expired the Governors and Trustees met at the

* Strickland's *Queens of England*

† *MSS. of the Earl of Lonsdale.* Hist. MSS. Comm.

cock-pit to pass the resolution that the sport should immediately cease on their property *

Cockers then built by subscription "the Royal Cock-pit" in Tufton Street, which remained their head-quarters until 1833, when it was made illegal † to keep a house for cock-fighting in London

The *Plumpton Letters* afford us a glimpse of cocking at the end of Henry VIII's reign. Sir Henry Saville writes on 5th May, 1546, to his cousin Plumpton asking him to come to Sheffield and "see our good cocks fight, if it please you to see the manner of our cocking. There will be Lancashire of one part and Derbyshire of another part and Hallamshire of the third part. I perceive your cocking varieth from ours for ye lay but the battle; and if our battle be but £10 to £5, there will be £10 to one lay or the battle be ended"

From which it appears that even at this date cock-matches between counties were in vogue.

During Queen Elizabeth's reign (1558-1603) cocking flourished. In Philip Stubbes' *Anatomy of Abuses*, published 1583, we read that "people flocked thick and three-fold to the cock-fights" which were held on appointed

* *Light Come, Light Go.* By Ralph Nevill (1909)

† 3 Wm. IV, C. 19, sec 29

days, Sunday being one. The cock match at a public pit was announced by "hanging out flags and ensigns to give notice of it"; also "proclamation goes out to proclaim the same"; by which it will no doubt be correct to understand that the entertainment was announced by the street crier

Philip Stubbes has been called "the first of the Puritans." He attacked all the amusements of the age, with the greater vigour because Sunday—when fairs and markets were held—was the great day of the week for bear-baiting, cocking, hawking, hunting and the like

The old moralist goes to extremes in his anger, including football among what he calls "devilish pastimes"; but it is for cocking that he reserves his worst epithets. In the cock-pit "nothing is used but swearing, forswearing, deceit, fraud, collusion, cozenage, scolding, railing, convitious talking, fighting, brawling, quarrelling, drinking, and which is worst of all robbing of one another of their goods and that not by direct but indirect means." This last refers to betting, concerning which Stubbes held very strong opinions

The attitude towards cocking of Roger Ascham, a famous scholar of this period, was representative of the vast majority. Ascham

Lambert Marshall, *Pinxt.* J. Ramsey, *Sculpt.*

This picture was commissioned by Mr. A. Pavis to commemorate the success of a Cock bred by Mr. Sadler at Aldworth, Gloucestershire, by one of his old Duckwings, out of a Tribe Hen—*Sporting Magazine*, 1831

was tutor to the Princess Elizabeth 1548-1550, and filled the same office in 1558 when she became Queen. In his work "The Schoolmaster," he avowed his love of cock-fighting and his intention of writing "a Book of the Cock-pit" in which "all kinds of pastimes fit for a gentleman" should be described

Unfortunately Ascham did not live to carry out his purpose. Camden attributes the poverty in which Roger Ascham passed his later days to excessive indulgence in cocking and dicing

George Wilson, to whose work on cocking reference has already been made, appears to have had Stubbes' diatribe in mind when he wrote twenty-four years later. The opening passages read as though they had been penned in direct refutation of Stubbes' charges. Wilson's book, however, referring as it does to cocking in the days of James I, must be noticed in a fresh chapter

Cock-fighting in Stuart Times

George Wilson is at pains to declare that the atmosphere of the cock-pit was one of order and fair dealing :—

> "In this pleasant exercise there is no collusion, deceit, fraud or cozening tolerated,

> nor any used (as in most other games and pastimes customarily there is), neither is there any brawlings or quarrels suffered in those places; but all men must there use civil and good behaviour what degree or calling soever he be of"

Swearing and blasphemy were strictly forbidden, and offenders were liable to punishment prescribed by the nobility

Wilson was a country gentleman, and he wrote of the sport as it was carried on in the eastern counties. The "nobility" referred to were those who pitted their birds in the royal cock-pit at Westminster, and set the fashion. No mention is made of rules for the sport itself, evidently none had yet been found necessary

This writer's account of the enthusiasm roused by the successes at Bury St. Edmunds of a cock called Gipsey, bred by himself, sheds interesting light on the position cock-fighting then held in England. This bird

> "fought so courageously, that after many admirable and almost incredible acts achieved by him, divers gentlemen, my very good friends, in commendation of him, caused his picture to be drawn and painted

upon a cloth, whereupon these, or the like, words were written :

O noble Gipsey such a cock art thou,
As Bury Town did ne'er contain till now ;
Wherefore to praise thy worth and spread
thy fame
We make this show in honour of thy name

"So soon as the painted cloth was thus finished the cock was put into a pretty fine cage which two men carried betwixt them, the cloth being borne a good distance before them ; and in this wise, having the waits (band) of the town with us, the trained soldiers, the cock masters and divers others, we marched to and fro throughout the whole town ; which being done we returned to the cock-pit again where the cock was no sooner set down but all the soldiers discharged their pieces over him, which we thought would have daunted and discouraged him for ever ; yet notwithstanding all the noise they made, he was nothing dismayed, but in the very middle of the volley of shot he clapped his wings and crowed "

A famous fighting cock in those days was regarded much as a great race horse is regarded in our own time

Stowe, in his *Survey of London*, 1603, says; "Cocks of the game are yet cherished by diverse men for their pleasure, much money being laid on their heads when they fight in pits, whereof some be costly made for that purpose"

Cock-fighting about this time would have received stimulus, if any were needed, from the patronage of royalty. James I (1603-1625) was particularly fond of it. Mons. Le Fèvre de la Boderie, French Ambassador to England from 1606 to 1611, says that the King amused himself with cocking, regularly two days a week

When the King paid a visit to Lincoln in 1617 cocking formed one of the diversions arranged for his amusement. On Wednesday, 2nd April, in that year "His Majesty did come in his caroche (coach) to the sign of the George by the Stonebow to see a cocking there, where he appointed four cocks to be put on the pit together, which made his Majesty very merry" *

Here perhaps was the crude beginning of that form of cock-fighting afterwards known as the "Battle Royal" to which reference will be made later

* *MSS. of the Corporation of Lincoln.* Hist. MSS. Comm.

Game-fowl in Stuart Times

During James I's reign, the first instructive book on the subject was published. Wilson's work, already noticed, consisted largely of quotations from Greek and Roman writers, and was what its title declared: a book in praise of cocking; it contained little practical information. The work now under notice was of a different character: it was written by Gervaise Markham in 1614, and its title "The Pleasure of Princes" plainly refers to James I's love of the sport. Like Wilson, Markham begins with a few lines in praise of the sport for its purity:—

> "Since there is no pleasure more noble, delightsome or void of cozenage (free from trickery) and deceit than this pleasure of cocking is; and since many of the best wisdoms of our nation have been pleased to participate with the delights therein, I think it not amiss . . . to declare in a few lines the election, breeding and secrets of dieting the fighting cock, which, having been concealed and unwritten of, is for our pleasure sake as worthy a general knowledge as any delight whatsoever

Markham proceeds to describe the character and qualities to be sought in the "cock for battle." The first point to be considered was

the size; cocks too large or too small were condemned, those of middle size being recommended as "most matchable, strong, nimble and ready for your pleasure." The huge cock was not only difficult to match: it was "lubberly and afforded small pleasure in his battle."

Such over-sized birds at this period were called "turn-pokes" (a term which at a somewhat later date was replaced by "shake-bags") a sufficiently expressive way of describing the bird, which was released by turning the bag or poke upside down on the pit

The undersized cock was also objected to as hard to match; the bird of average size was sure to find opponents

The fighting cock, according to Markham, should be "of a proud and upright shape with a small head like unto a spar-hawk (sparrow hawk), a quick large eye and a strong beak, crooked and big at the setting on"; the colour of the beak should match that of the plumage, as also the colour of the legs, which were to be "very strong in the beam." The spurs, long, rough and sharp, and a little bending and looking inwards

It is of interest to notice the colours—indicative of strain or breeding—which were

preferred at this time; also to compare their small number with the wealth of prized strains, which were developed as time went on and the importance of careful breeding became more and more generally recognised

Markham says that the best were "the grey pile, the yellow pile or else red with the black breast." The pied bird was not esteemed, "and the white and dun are the worst." The "red with the black breast" were without doubt the strain known at a later date as the "black red"

Redness above the head indicated lust, strength and courage; pallor the reverse; but the principal clue to a bird's courage lay in the way he moved—"the pride of his going" in the walk, and by the frequency of his crowing in the pen

Breeders at this period crossed their game fowl with the common barn-door breeds; the theory was that in such crossing all depended on the hen: "the perfect hen from a Dunghill cock will bring a good chicken; but the best cock from a Dunghill hen can never get a good bird." He cites the two most famous cocks that ever fought in his time, Noble and Grissell, which from ill-bred hens begat many very bad cocks. Markham adds that it is of

course preferable to breed from pure blood on both sides

Wilson, already quoted, condemns half-bred cocks altogether

Markham's advice on the treatment of the hen is worth notice : March was held the best month in which to breed game-fowl ; "one March bird is ever better worth than three at any other season." The delicate constitution of the birds is insisted on ; the nest, of soft and clean straw, was to be in some warm place, and the hen carefully tended that she might not leave her eggs too long uncovered : the chicks first hatched were to be wrapped in wool and kept near the fire, until the rest of the eggs hatched out, when the brood was to be restored to the hen, and all kept very warm, "for they be so tender (delicate) that the least cold will kill them"

Hen and brood were kept indoors in a large room with a boarded floor till the chicks were a month old ; feeding on oatmeal, cheeseparings. "chilter meat" and the like. After the first month the chicks might be allowed to run in some grass court, where there were no foul puddles or dirty water, such being the "greatest poison" to game-fowl

When the chicks were old enough to distinguish sexes, the beginnings of combs and wattles were cut away and seared close, the sores being anointed with butter until the place healed. "This will make them have fine, small, slender and smooth heads; whereas to suffer the comb to grow to his bigness and then cut it away, will make him have a gouty thick head with great lumps"

The chickens were separated when they began to peck at one another, and sent to separate walks

Here it may be observed that until comparatively recent times, landlords used to insert in leases a clause binding tenants to run game-cocks for them. It may be doubted whether such clauses were very necessary in the days when cock-fighting was every man's sport. Tenants would be only too eager to receive and care for a well-bred fighting cock

Much stress was laid on the necessity for isolating game-birds from common poultry: the sitting hen was kept where the barn-yard fowls could not disturb her; and when the young birds were old enough to be sent to their walks, the quietest places were held the best: "Wind-mills or Water-mills, Grange-houses and such like, where he (the cock) may

live with his hens without the offence or company of other cocks"

The cock master always fed his birds on soft ground, that their beaks might not be blunted by contact with stones

The cock that began to crow before he was six months old, or crowed at unseasonable times, was not esteemed : premature or irregular crowing being held a symptom of cowardice. "For the true cock is very long before he gets his voice and when he hath it he observes his hour with the best judgement"

Three hens were considered enough to run with one cock

Special attention was devoted to the perches in the roost : it was to be thick as a man's arm and level, a thin, crooked, or ill-placed perch tending to make the bird "uneven heeled" when he would never be a good striker. "The perches should be near the ground and short so that your cock may with care go up to them, and being set, must of force (perforce) have his legs stand near together, for it is a rule that he which is a close sitter is ever a narrow (accurate) striker." The ground below the perches should be soft that the birds might not hurt their feet in jumping down

Training Cocks for Battle

At two years old the cock was considered ready to fight, "complete in every member"; and the process of training began

The old cock masters had their own methods of feeding and preparing birds for battle, and were very secretive about them, with good reason; an untrained cock would have as little chance against a trained bird as an untrained horse against one which has undergone proper preparation.

The birds to be trained were taken up at the end of August (from which time till the end of May was the cocking season) and, being "sound, hard feathered and full summed" were put into separate pens; each pen about two feet square and three feet in height, barred and made to open in front, the sides close boarded so that one cock should not be able to see his neighbours

The training in Markham's time lasted six weeks. During the first three or four days the cock was fed on "old maunchet" (the best white bread) cut into small pieces, a large handful three times a day; four days of this diet was held enough to scour him thoroughly. This preliminary dieting over, the cock had his

first bout of sparring with another, the spurs of either bird being muffled in "hots" which were "soft bumbasted rolls of leather" so that they could not hurt one another

After the sparring bout, which took place in the early morning at the time when, ordinarily, food was given, the bird was "sweated," *i.e.*, put into a basket made for the purpose, covered with straw and allowed to "stove and sweat." Before he was put into the "stove," he was given a condiment made of butter, rosemary finely chopped and white sugar candy mixed together, as large as a man's thumb. After four o'clock in the afternoon the bird was taken out, and his head and eyes having been licked over with the cock master's tongue, he was restored to his pen and received his first meal that day

The bread used during the training was of a special kind, made of wheatmeal and oatmeal mixed into a stiff paste, with ale, eggs and butter ; this dough was well worked up, rolled out into thin cakes and kept for three or four days before use. Some cock masters mixed aniseed, licorice, or other spices with the dough, but the practice was not approved by all as tending to heat the blood

An old pair of "Hots" (muffs) for muffling the spurs of Cocks

After the sweating, the cock had a day's rest; and then he was given "heats": the trainer took the bird out upon some enclosed plot of grass, and showing him a common cock, carried in his arms, enticed the game-cock to give chase, now and again allowing him a stroke at the common bird. He was kept running up and down in this way for half an hour

This routine, sparring, sweating and heating was continued for six weeks; three days' rest being allowed before he was brought into the cock-pit

It is a tribute to the soundness of this author's training maxims that more than eighty years afterwards (in 1697) Tregonwell Frampton transcribed them almost verbatim as the rules which from long experience he had found the best

Frampton was master of the race horses and game-cocks to King William III and his successors

In Markham's day, cock-fighting had not reached the state of organisation to which it attained later. Cocks were not matched by

ascertained weight but by judgment. This authority says :—

> "In your matching there is two things to be considered; that is the length of cocks and the strength of cocks; for if your adversary cock be too long, yours shall hardly catch his head and then he can neither endanger eye nor life; and if he be the stronger, he will over-bear your cock and not suffer him to rise and strike with any advantage; therefore for the knowledge of these two rules, though experience be the best tutor, yet the first, which is length, you shall judge by your eye when you grip the cock about the waist and make him shoot out his legs in which posture you shall see the utmost of his height, and so compare them in your judgement. . . . Now for his strength, which is known by the thickness of his body, for that cock is ever held the strongest which is largest in the girth, you shall know it by the measure of your hands gripping the cock"

Artificial spurs had not at this time come into use. To prepare the cock for battle the beak and spurs were smoothed and sharpened with a knife; the "mane" was clipped off close to the neck, from head to setting on of the

shoulders : the tail was clipped to the rump, and the wing feathers cut "slope wise with sharp points, that in his rising he may endanger the eye of his adversary"

It is impossible to read the old author's pages without being impressed by the minuteness of his instructions to the cocker from the very first stage of the breeding part of the business to the last—the treatment of wounded cocks. There is nothing like it in contemporary literature nor for generations afterwards ; clear proof of the importance of the place cock-fighting held in the daily life of our ancestors three hundred years ago

No rules for the conduct of cock-fights had come into use when Markham wrote in 1614. This seems certain from the author's omission to mention rules

Prohibition of Cocking by Cromwell

During the Commonwealth public cocking was made illegal, the Statute in this sense being passed in the year 1654

The times were disturbed and the wording of the Act shows that it was not the sport to

which the authorities objected, but to the political mischief which might be hatched under pretext of meetings for sport:—

> "Whereas the public meetings and assemblies of people together in divers parts of this nation, under pretence of matches for cock-fighting, are by experience found to tend many times to the disturbance of the public peace . . . it is ordained . . . that from henceforth there shall be no public or set-meetings or assemblies of any persons within England or Wales upon matches made for cock-fighting"

Horse racing, it may be observed, for the same reason was forbidden for a term of six months from 6th July in the same year. Similar edicts against the "disaffected" were issued in 1655 and 1659. The former states that it is at horse races, cock-fights and bear-baitings that "rebellion is usually hatched"

Under an Act passed in 1656, persons who "by playing at cards, dice, tables, tennis, bowls, or shovelboard, cock-fighting or by horse races," or by betting thereon, won money were made liable to forfeit double the amount won

The fact that betting on cock-fighting was made a punishable offence, shows that the sport

itself was not forbidden, as some authorities have maintained

Charles II as a Cocker

Charles II (1660-1685) was an enthusiastic cocker; the pile cocks, introduced by this monarch were "held in high estimation among numerous breeders at this day," says a writer * of admitted authority, in 1819

Annual mains were instituted at the Westminster cock-pit in Charles II's time, and these continued until the days of the Regency or later †. The earliest code of laws governing the sport are attributed to this period. The brief rules transcribed on p. 30 are assigned ‡ to the reign of Charles II, but there are reasons for believing that they are not authentic

They do not mention the curious method of deciding a match known as "pounding" which

* Article on Cock-fighting in *Rees' Cyclopædia*, by Thomas Bourne, a famous Cornish cocker, known as "Tommy the Sweep"

† *Ibid*

‡ These "Rules relating to the Matching and Fighting of Cocks in London" are given in Heber's *Sporting Calendar* for 1751: prefaced with the statement that they "are said to have been in practice there ever since the reign of King Charles II"

was in vogue in 1663, as shown in the passage in Samuel Pepys's Diary quoted on pages 36-7; and the directions for matching birds indicate actual weighment in scales, a practice which was certainly not universal in Charles II's time

"The methods of fighting a main are:—

"To begin the same by fighting the lightest pair of cocks (which fall in March) first, proceeding upwards, to the end; that every lighter pair may fight earlier than those that are heavier

"In matching (with relation to the battles) it is a rule always in London—

"That after the cocks of the main are weighed, and the Match Bills are compared

"That every pair of dead, or equal, weight are separated and fight against others, provided that it appears that the main can be enlarged, by adding thereto either one battle or more, thereby" *

As regards the period when matching cocks by careful weighing came into vogue, Dr. Robert Plott writing in 1686, the year after Charles II's death, describes, and gives a drawing of, an ingenious appliance for gauging

* *See* Appendix C

the length and girth of cocks which was invented by Sir Richard Astley of Patshull. The cock to be measured was secured by the body on a central movable pedestal, his head made fast to a fixed perch and his feet to another perch sliding in a frame, marked in eighths of an inch. Nothing is said by Dr. Plott of the introduction of weighing which would have rendered Sir Richard Astley's contrivance obsolete

The last rule directing the separation of birds of "dead or equal weight" to prolong the main needs explanation. Cocks which weighed within one ounce of each other were said to "fall in," and if there were enough of such cocks of even weight shown, these fought the main battles among themselves, the lighter and heavier cocks being thrown into the byes. But if the cocks thus "falling in" were few, it was usual to separate and pit them against the lighter and heavier birds, so as to increase the number of battles and decrease the number of byes which did not count in scoring

Royal Cockings at Newmarket

It was during his visits to Newmarket that Charles II appears most prominently as a cocker. On 13th April, 1676, Mr. Secretary

Coventry writes, dating his letter 9 p.m., to Mr. Secretary Williamson: "We have been almost all day, morning and afternoon, in the field, and his Majesty is at this time at the cock-pit by candle-light"

The cockings at Newmarket were often advertised in the *London Gazette*. The following appeared in that journal of February 28th/March 4th, 1678:—

> "These are to give notice that there will be two great Matches of Cocking fought in His Majesty's Cock-pit at Newmarket, the one in Easter week next and the other in the week following; and all gentlemen concerned therein are desired to send their cocks accordingly. The Grand Match will be in the week after Easter"

Another announcement in the *London Gazette* of February 5th/9th, 1679, throws light on the progress of the sport:—

> "The Masters of His Majesty's Cock-pit do desire all gentlemen that love the game to send in their cocks to the pit at Newmarket in such seasonable time as they may be fit to fight, they intending to begin the said Cock match on the 15th day of March: and there shall be feeders ready to take care of their cocks"

This is the earliest mention of "feeders" or trainers of fighting cocks: the sport under royal patronage was assuming organisation

The appeal to intending cockers to send their birds "in seasonable time, that they may be fit to fight" lends point to a maxim of cocking well understood in those days. Travel upset the fighting cock; no matter how carefully the birds might be conveyed, they required several days rest to recover from the effects of a journey; and this rest would have been particularly necessary at a time when wheeled vehicles were still of the rudest description and jolted over execrable roads

If the cocks were carried on horse-back, their travelling plight in cock-bags would have been no better. Hence the notice early in February to send birds in good time for the matches to take place in the middle of March.

On 14th March, 1683, the Duke of York at Newmarket, writing to the Countess of Lichfield, says, the weather has been so bad "cock-fighting has been almost the only thing we could do here, and that for the most part we have twice a day"

Sir John Reresby in his *Memoirs*, writing in

March, 1684, describes a day in King Charles II's life at Newmarket :—

> "Walking in the morning till 10 o'clock. Then he went to the cock-pit till dinner time ; about three he went to the horse-races ; at six to the cock-pit for an hour ; then to the play, though the comedians were very indifferent ; next to the Duchess of Portsmouth's till bed time, and then to his own apartments to bed"

From Stuart times onward, racing and cock-fighting went hand in hand until the law practically made an end of the latter. Race meetings afforded an opportunity for cock matches between individuals, towns and counties ; and of these our ancestors took advantage until the early years of Queen Victoria's reign

The first *Racing Calendar* (Cheney's, 1727) contains particulars of cock-matches fought at various meetings, and such are given in every ensuing volume down to that of 1840

There was a Royal cock-pit at Windsor ; the *London Gazette* in 1684 advertises a "Great Match of Cock-fighting between Two Persons of Quality" to be held there, with the intimation that "it will last the whole week." There were also Royal pits at York and Dublin

This bird fought at the Royal Cock-pit, Westminster, and won a battle at 20 to 1. After which he won in the two years following at Guildford. —*Sporting Magazine*, 1792.

This bird fought 11 battles, after which he was made a breed cock. 36 of his sons fought at the Royal Cock-pit, Westminster, in one main, of which 32 won their battles.

Gaming was carried to excess after the Restoration, and the public cock-pits, like other places open to the world, were the haunts of bad characters; hence the inclusion of cock-pits in Charles II's law (16 Car. II., c. 7) of 1664 against "disorderly and excessive gaming." This was an endeavour to suppress cheating and "welshing" at cards, dice, tables, tennis, bowls, "kittles" (skittles), shovelboard, cocking, horse-racing, dog matches and foot-races

Any person who "by unlawful devise or ill practice" should win money over these sports and games was to forfeit thrice the amount of his winnings

London Cocking under Charles II

Samuel Pepys gives an occasional glimpse of the sport as he saw it in the public cock-pits of London. These being open to all by payment it is not surprising that the crowd and its behaviour invited criticism. On 21st December, 1663, he writes:—

"Being directed by sight of bills upon the walls, I did go to Shoe Lane to see a cock-fighting at a new pit there, a sport I was

never at in my life; but Lord! to see the strange variety of people from Parliament man . . . to the poorest 'prentices, bakers, butchers, brewers draymen and what not; and all these fellows one with another in swearing, cursing and betting"

Pepys says he soon had enough of it, and yet he was glad to have seen a main once

"It being strange to observe the nature of these poor creatures, how they will fight till they drop down dead upon the table, and strike after they are ready to give up the ghost, not offering to run away when they are weary or wounded past doing further, whereas where a Dunghill brood (bred one) comes, he will, after a sharp stroke that pricks him, run off the stage, and then they wring off his neck without more ado, whereas the other they preserve, though the eyes be both out, for breed only of a true cock of the game

"Sometimes a cock that has ten to one against him will by chance give an unlucky blow, will strike the other starke dead in a moment, that he never stirs more; but the common rule is, that though a cock neither runs nor dies, yet if any man will bet £10 to

a crown and nobody take the bet, the game is given over and not sooner *

"One thing more it is strange to see how people of this poor rank, that look as if they had not bread to put in their mouths, shall bet three or four pounds at one bet and lose it, and yet bet as much the next battle (so they call every match of two cocks), so that one of them will lose £10 or £20 at a meeting"

Pepys refers to the cock-pit in Shoe Lane as "new": it is probable that he uses the word in the sense of restored or re-opened after the Commonwealth, for a cock-pit existed in Shoe Lane during the time of James I. It was there that Sir Thomas Jermin, a famous cocker who died in 1644, played the knavish trick recorded.† Meaning, says the chronicler to—

"make himself merry and gull all the cockers, he sent his man to the pit in Shoe Lane with an hundred pounds and a dunghill cock neatly cut and trimmed for the battle; the plot being well laid, the fellow got another

* This was called "pounding." The spectator who offered the bet laid his hat or glove on the pit as a token of challenge; if anyone took up the wager he also laid his hat or some other article on the pit; and both "tokens" lay till the bet was decided

† Harleian MSS. 6395, Temp. Jac. I

to throw the cock in, and fight him in Sir Thomas Jermin's name, while he betted his hundred pounds against him ; the cock was matched and, bearing Sir Thomas's name, had many bets laid upon his head ; but after three or four good brushes he showed a pair of heels : everyone wondered to see a cock belonging to Sir Thomas cry *craven*, and away came the man with his money doubled "

Pepys's reference to "the common rule" that though a cock neither ran nor died, yet if any man would bet £10 to a crown and nobody took it, the game was given over," clearly shows that "pounding" was a well-established cock law, early in Charles II's reign, though it is not mentioned in the laws quoted on p. 30

The Code in which this rule is included, is not to be found among contemporary publications ; it was published, as already stated, in Heber's *Historical List of Horse Matches* in 1751

Pepys makes mention of three cock-pits besides that in Shoe Lane. There was one in Drury Lane, another in Aldersgate Street, and a third, which he calls "the New Cock-pit," by the King's Gate in Holborn. The Whitehall cock-pit is referred to also, but only as the lodging of the Duke of Albemarle, with whom

the diarist's official duties brought him in frequent contact

Pepys paid two visits to the New Cock-pit in Holborn. The first time he went he was deterred from going in by the rabble about the doors ; on the second occasion he came away after seeing two battles. Cock-fighting in his opinion was "no great sport," but he was again deeply impressed by the courage of the birds

The diarist does not refer to the cock-pit in Jewin Street. This was one of the buildings which escaped destruction in the Great Fire of London, 1666, and for some years after, until the churches* were rebuilt, it served as the religious meeting-house of one Grimes and his followers

Another cock-pit was that behind Gray's Inn ; this was put in order after the Restoration, having been apparently closed during the Commonwealth ; it continued in existence certainly for a hundred years. It is shown on Strype's map of London dated 1754

Provincial Cocking

Cock-fights were occasionally held in the church at this time. The parish register of

* Eighty-eight churches, including St. Paul's, were destroyed in the Great Fire

Hemingborough, Yorks, contains this entry: "February 2nd 1661. Upon fastene (fasting) day last, they came with their cocks in to the church and fought them in the church—namely, Thos Middleton of Cliff, John Coats, Ed Nidhouse and John Batley"

It must be remembered that few churches were furnished with pews at this period, and there was thus ample space for the business

Cock-fighting was slow in reaching Scotland. It was introduced into that Country in the year 1681, by the Duke of York, and speedily found favour. Two years later, in 1683, a cock-pit was built at Leith, and the matches fought evidently attracted larger audiences than the Edinburgh authorities, anxious for the moral and worldly welfare of the citizens, could approve

In 1704, an attempt was made by the Town Council to close the Leith cock-pit as an "impediment to business"; and in the event, one day's sport a year was sanctioned

It is hardly necessary to describe the cock-pit and its surroundings: the pit itself was a circular table or mound of earth about the height of an ordinary dinner table, about 20 feet in diameter, covered with matting and having a board barrier eight or ten inches high

enclosing it. The audience crowded round the pit and occupied rising tiers of seats

Matches out of doors were always fought on the grass, and when they took place in a room in the country, where such preparation was feasible the floor was spread with sods of turf. This not being practicable in London and large towns whose pits were in constant use, matting, at a later date carpet, was used in place of turf; nevertheless, so closely was the grass-covered pit associated with the sport, that "the sod" bore to cocking the same significance as "the turf" bears to racing in our days

Cocking in James II's Reign

Cock-fighting continued to flourish during the brief reign of James II (1685-88), though that monarch does not appear to have taken interest in the sport

The following letter, written in April, 1687, by Bridget Noel to her sister the Countess of Rutland, shows the interest taken by ladies in the sport at this period :—

> "I am extremely sorry it is not possible for us to wait on my dear sister sooner than the 28th and 20th of May, for there is a cocking and horse matches which we have

promised to be at. My Lord Toumand (Thomond) will be at the great cocking, and (Lord) Barney and Lord Grandson and a great many more Lords that I do not know their names. It is said here it will be as great a match has ever as been. Barney intends to back our cocks with some thousands for he is of our side" *

Men of good social standing made matches which were fought in public, but as a rule the names of the principals were not published. The *London Gazette* of 22nd May, 1690, notifies "a great match of cock-fighting 2 gs. and 50 gs., between Two Persons of Honour at the cock-pit, Clerkenwell Close"

Cocking in William III's Reign

Mons. Misson, a French gentleman who paid a visit to this country about 1690 or 1691, and wrote an account of all he saw, says:—

"Cock-fighting is one of the great English diversions: they build Amphitheatres for this purpose and Persons of Quality sometimes appear at them. Great wagers are

* *MSS. of the Duke of Rutland at Belvoir Castle.* Hist. MSS. Comm.

laid ; but I am told that a man may be damnably bubbled if he is not very sharp " *

William III (1694-1702) was an ardent cocker. He spent much time at Newmarket, and on wet days the cock-pit was " enclosed by stars and blue ribands " ; which suggests that cocking in the presence of royalty was a function attended by the Court and distinguished visitors in full dress

It is at this period that the term " Battle Royal " is first employed. It was used to describe the fight when a number of cocks turned into the pit together. *The Postman* of 20/22 April, 1699, thus chronicles such a battle :

" On 18th April, His Majesty hunted and in the afternoon went to the cock-pit where a Battle Royal of 9 cocks together at once upon the pit was fought : most of them were killed and two brothers carried the victory after fighting as long as both could stand by the other "

The celebrated Tregonwell Frampton, Master of the King's Race Horses and Game-cocks, became a prominent figure about this time. In April, 1698, a match was arranged

* Misson's *Memoir*. Ozell's Translation

between Lord Ross and Mr. Frampton, 25 cocks a side at 5 guineas the match and £500 the odd. The King was present at the first day's sport, which comprised six battles; the main was continued daily until the whole twenty-five matches had been fought out. Mr. Frampton's cocks won sixteen out of the twenty-five

Various Kinds of Mains

A "long main" lasted four days or more; a "short main" consisted of two or three days' cocking. A "Welsh main" was fought out in the same way as a modern coursing match; eight or sixteen cocks, all about the same weight, viz., about 4 lbs. 4 ozs., were entered and drawn to fight in pairs; and the winners in each match were paired until the two surviving winners met in the final. The Welsh main at a later period was most popular in the North of England

The "Devonshire main" seems to have been peculiar to Devon and Cornwall. In this the matches were fought by "set weight." A pair of birds each of 4 lbs. were matched, then a pair of 4 lbs. 1 oz., then a pair of 4 lbs. 2 ozs, and so on, each pair weighing an ounce each more than the last till the maximum of

5 lbs. 3 ozs. was reached. The Devonshire main was, in effect, a refinement of the orthodox system

The Battle Royal and the Welsh main were the features of cocking to which its opponents most strenuously objected : they were peculiar to English cocking

The usual system was to make a main consist of an uneven number of battles—9, 15, 21 or 25, in order that one competitor might win a majority

Cocking and Racing

The great majority of cockers "fed," *i.e.*, trained their own birds : wealthy men employed their own feeders ; but there were also feeders who made it their business to train the cocks of patrons for payment, as race-horse trainers do now. The Duke of Rutland's accounts for June, 1695, include this item : "To the cock feeder at Leicester, for feeding 3 cocks, 7/6 "

It is interesting to notice the relative importance of racing and cocking in William III's time. In March, 1699, racing and cock-fighting were advertised to take place at Swaffham in Norfolk. The racing consisted of one event, a plate of 30 guineas ; the cocking lasted three days. In regard to this it must be remembered

that a single race run in heats, as the practice then was, would provide sport for the better part of a March afternoon; but the devotion of three days to cocking clearly indicates the general popularity of the sport. Men whose means fell far short of indulgence in racing took active part in cocking

First Record of Artificial Spurs

It is impossible to discover the exact date when artificial spurs first came into use. It may be taken for granted that they were unknown in Charles II's time, or Pepys would not have failed to remark upon them. They had come into vogue a few years afterwards, and were used in William III's reign, as appears from an entry in the personal accounts of the then Duke of Rutland; "6th April, 1698, paid Mr. Sherburne for 6 pairs of cocks' spurs at Newmarket, £3" *

In the year 1703, a Quaker named Kingston published at Exeter a book or pamphlet in which he vehemently condemned cock-fighting as brutal, and at the time he wrote had become in his judgment yet more barbarous by reason of the use of "metal spurs"

* *MSS. of the Duke of Rutland at Belvoir Castle.* Hist. MSS. Comm

Training in Queen Anne's Time

Cocking flourished during Queen Anne's reign (1702-1714) and some curious variations were introduced at some resorts. Before noticing these it is necessary to draw attention to the changes which had grown up in the system of preparing birds for the pit, as shown in a book * published at this time. The writer of this work did not put his name to it

The prolonged training of six weeks with the severe sweatings or "stovings" recommended by Gervaise Markham had been given up; a fortnight's "dieting" was held enough for a small cock, and three weeks or more for a large one; a mild sweating of 3 or 4 hours once or twice a quarter was recommended in place of the prolonged ordeal which lasted from early morning till four in the afternoon

The comb was no longer cut close to the skull as in former days, but "smoothly cut into the shape of a half moon," so that it served both for guard and ornament. No doubt there was much to be said in favour of the change, which left the cock's head some slight protection from the beak of its foe, but fashion or regard for appearances also seems to have had

* *The Royal Pastime of Cock-fighting.* By R. H., A Lover of the Sport. (1709)

something to do with it, as *The Royal Pastime of Cocking* says "close cutting makes them appear sneaking." Close cutting was also objected to on the ground that it weakened the bird's beak. It may be doubted whether it produced this effect

The greater exactness which had been arrived at in breeding is shown by the importance this authority attaches to "close heeling" or "sure pointing," in other words, to accurate striking. There were "many ways to help a cock and make him point well," but the cocker's great object was to breed from a strain of "sure heelers," avoiding birds that were "dull heeled, wide, or short stricken." Hence the scrupulous care bestowed upon the feet: perches wrapped round with straw ropes to give safe and comfortable foothold were used with the object of keeping them in good order.

As for the natural spurs to which paramount importance attached in previous days, these naturally became of no moment now artificial weapons had come into general use. They were cut short, the "heel" if used at all, serving as a foundation on which to place the metal spur

The spur was not by any means always put on exactly where the natural "heel" grew; on

the contrary ; an important part of the trainer's duty was to closely observe his birds while sparring and decide the exact place where the weapon could be fixed with greatest advantage. "There can be no certain rule about heeling. Some cocks want heels very high, others very low." It depended on the individual bird's method of striking

The author of *The Royal Pastime of Cocking* had no preferences in the matter of colour, by which we may safely understand that he was not a believer in any particular strain or breed : "That is the best which you fancy most, be it black or white, red or dun, grey or piled or any other colour whatever" ; but it is probable that contemporary cock masters would not have agreed with him on this head

If this authority had no prejudice in favour of one strain or another, he held strong views concerning the size of cocks. He had no opinion of the large cock that weighed 9 or 10 lbs. or more, and was from 36 to 40 inches long. Such a bird was not, in his judgment, fit to encounter the smaller cock ; with a 6 lb. or 8 lb. bird the cocker might fight the largest, the odds being two to one on the little one, which "not only lies under and secure from blows which pass

over, but has the advantage of under holds, and, having strength to strike home and close, seldom fails to win"

Equally, he disapproves of very small cocks; holding it almost impossible for a 3-lb. cock to beat one of 5 lbs.; the larger bird "takes him in the rising and commonly nicks him at the first coming in"

Apropos of the relative merits of large or small cocks the author of *The Royal Pastime of Cocking* says: "It is all the mode of late to weigh them." He did not approve of the practice, because the scales paired together cocks of widely different shape; a small bird might be matched against a tall and thin one, which did not make for a good fight; and he thought the old method of measuring birds by hand and eye the better one of the two, provided the man who handled the cocks was skilled in his business

This authority insists upon the necessity for making cocks gentle and fearless in the hand: a bird that has been handled by a clumsy feeder or a rough one never appears to advantage; he is likely "to skut [scoot] and basely quit the pit, and that more for fear of being handled by the feeder." Any roughness in handling was condemned as making the birds wild and

"ROYAL COCK-PIT" by Wm. Hogarth

shy, a serious defect in the fighting cock however courageous in actual battle

Opinions at this period differed concerning the amount of sparring a young bird should be allowed to do while training. Most cock masters of this period considered frequent sparring hurtful

"Shake-bags"

Only the very large—"the giant or Herculean"—cock was called a "shake-bag" in Queen Anne's time. According to Dr. Wilde, a famous cocker of the age, the name originated in Scotland, being used to describe the cocks preferred by Dutchmen

The Dutch preference for large birds was due to the fact that they could be fought without weighing or matching at any inn or drinking resort; the Dutchman's habit was to "steep his brains in brandy" till he was past judging of a cock's size, and past handling him. These cockers neither saw the cock they were to fight with beforehand, nor laid a hand upon their own after he was brought into the pit, "but take the bag by the bottom and shake the

cock out upon the pit and so let him go at his adversary"

The cocker of the poorer classes preferred the shake-bag; the owners of inns and ale-houses gave prizes, and their patrons favoured a large bird, which they thought would fight anything. Such cockers were urged to choose birds that weighed from 6 to 8 lbs. when brought up from walk; their fighting weight would be less after training

At a later date the term "Shake-bag" acquired more definite meaning, being applied to cocks which exceeded 4 lbs. 8 ozs. in weight; such birds—also known as "Turn-outs"—were seldom matched by weight. The term "Turn-out" recalls that used in Gervaise Markham's day—"Turn-poke"

The author of *The Royal Pastime of Cocking* much preferred the fighting methods of the small cock to those of the large: the latter he says, "Like elephants, when down find it difficult to rise. They seldom strike but when their hold is strong, and then with their broad lances they dig such orifices in each others bulky sides," they are soon exhausted from loss of blood. The lancet-shaped spur was used for arming these large cocks

London Cocking in Anne's Reign

Various kinds of spurs were used in Queen Anne's time, as the following advertisement shows :—

> "On Wednesday a single battle will be fought with sickles after the East India manner, and on Thursday a Battle Royal, one cock with a sickle and four cocks with fair spurs. Friday a pair of shake-bags with fair spurs, and four matchable cocks which are to fight with sickles, lancet-spurs and penknife-spurs, the like never yet seen, for the entertainment of Foreign Ambassadors and gentlemen "*

Cocking always had its opponents, and in Queen Anne's reign there was agitation to make an end of it. This we learn from a remark in the preface to *The Royal Pastime of Cocking*. The author "would fain know, shall an innocent pastime be forbidden to all because some particular persons make ill use of it "

The sport had far too strong a hold on all classes to be in any danger of abolition; men of every class, from one extremity of the social scale to the other, bore part in it. The prize

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* *Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne.* J. Ashton

for a match varied from a fat pig at the public-house pit to a thousand guineas at a fashionable resort

Foreign visitors took a keen interest in English cocking, and purchased game-fowl from us then as they buy horses now. King Christian V of Denmark was a great lover of the sport; he not only held cock-fights at appointed times but "always hung out costly ensigns and rich flags whereon is portrayed both the place (of cocking) and very gestures of the cock"

This King had music to play "martial airs" when the cocks were brought upon the pit; and the birds and the weapons which were to be fastened upon their heels were displayed to the spectators before the cocks were set to. Sir William Corby, Resident at the Danish Court, testified to the esteem in which English game-fowl were held in Denmark

It was an age of gaming and high play, and large stakes were sometimes put up on cocking matches. The largest stake advertised during Queen Anne's reign was 10 guineas the battle and 500 guineas the odd. This was a main fought at the "Old Red Lyon Cock-pit," behind Gray's Inn Walks, between the Gentlemen of Essex against the rest of Great Britain it lasted a week

The Red Lion Cock-pit—to adopt modern spelling—was a fashionable resort during Queen Anne's reign. In March and April, 1704, the Gentlemen of Essex and Cambridgeshire matched their cocks against those of London and Surrey: 10 guineas a battle and 200 guineas the odd

This pit was burned down in 1708 under circumstances which go to show the care good feeders took of their birds. There had been cocking on a Saturday and, the weather being cold, two feeders named Compton and Day remained all night with their cocks to make sure they were warm. A candle accidentally falling among the straw the building caught fire and one of the men was burned to death

Where wagering ran high, as round the cock-pits, there were always blacklegs and welchers bent on defrauding their neighbours if opportunity served. The cockers' law for dealing with such men was peculiar. In every cock-pit was a large basket to which was fastened a rope passed through a pulley in the roof. The welcher was put into the basket, drawn up and kept there until the sport was over, when he was lowered and, we need not doubt, received very rough handling. "Basketing," as this was called, continued until the early years of

the nineteenth century. It had nearly gone out of use in 1803*, cockers contenting themselves with turning the offender out-of-doors with cuffs and kicks. Hogarth's well-known picture—the scene of which is the Westminster Cock-pit—shows the basket in use

The full text of this rule will be found in Appendix A

Cocking in the Georgian Days

The last year of George I's reign saw publication of the first regular annual record of cocking in Britain, at least in so far as important matches are concerned. John Cheney produced his *Historical List of all Horse Matches Run in 1726*, and included, as an appropriate adjunct to Turf records "a List of the Cock Matches of the Year" †

These records throw a certain amount of light on the methods of the time. Ardent cockers might agree to meet and pit their cocks annually for a number of years. Thus, at Weston in Cheshire (always a great cocking county), in 1727, Mr. Steatham fought

* *Sporting Dictionary*. Wm. Taplin. (1803)

† The term "main" has been used in the foregoing pages as a matter of convenience; this word, however, did not come into use until about 1727. "Cock match" was the term till then applied to a battle or series of battles; from 1727, "main" was increasingly used

Mr. Poole, each "showing" 21 cocks for 6 guineas a battle, and 20 guineas the odd; won by Mr. Steatham ten battles to six. These two gentlemen at the same time (first week in April, 1727) fought seven pairs of shake-bags for 10 guineas the battle and 20 guineas the odd; won by Mr. Poole four battles to three

Messrs. Steatham and Poole fought a return match at Leek in Staffordshire, in May, 21 cocks a side, for 6 guineas and 20 guineas; won by Mr. Poole nine battles to five. Seven pairs of shake-bags were also pitted, Mr. Steatham winning four to three. They further agreed to fight each other once at Weston and once at Leeke every year for the next seven years, "every time showing 21 match or battle cocks, and to fight seven pairs of shake-bags, and for the same sum"

Messrs. Gumzere and Fridenberg arranged to fight a series of mains twice a year for five years, each to show 41 cocks, 6 guineas a battle and 100 guineas the main. The record of these ten matches is not complete; the last two were fought in 1750 at the Old Red Lion pit at the back of Gray's Inn

Matches between counties were an institution; Cheshire fought Lancashire, 31 cocks a side for 5 guineas and 50 guineas; frequently

a town would fight a county, as when Hampshire fought Reading, 41 cocks a side, for 4 guineas and 40 guineas

Sometimes a single cocker fought a town or a whole county, as when Sir Jonathan Jenkins fought Derbyshire in July, 1727, showing 21 cocks a side, for 2 guineas a battle and 20 guineas the odd. Derbyshire was totally outmatched on this occasion, Sir Jonathan winning thirteen or fourteen of the battles and the county only two or three

The difference between the number of cocks "shown" on either side and the number of battles fought will be remarked; in the main last mentioned sixteen battles were fought and five byes; the method of separating birds to fight battles and byes respectively was explained on page 31

Cheney's account of the three matches fought in Cumberland (another great cocking county), shows the advantage enjoyed by the cocker who fought his birds at home; in other words, to the upsetting effects of travel on the cocks. One of the three matches was fought at Whitehaven by the gentlemen of that town against Carlisle and Penrith; the second at Penrith against Carlisle and Whitehaven; and the third at Carlisle against Whitehaven and

Penrith ; each match consisting of 26 cocks a side for 2 guineas and 20 guineas

In each of these three matches the home birds won : the Whitehaven cocks won at Whitehaven, the Penrith cocks at Penrith, and the Carlisle cocks at Carlisle, despite the fact that in each case the home birds had to meet the pick of the two other towns, "which seems, says the record, "to support the opinion of cocks receiving great damage by being far carried"

The stakes in such matches were not extravagantly high. The largest mentioned in the list of matches fought in 1727 were in the main fought between Preston and Wakefield. Thirty-one cocks were shown : 10 guineas a battle and 180 guineas the odd. Twenty battles were fought, of which one was drawn, and the pecuniary result was as follows :— Preston, 12 battles won at 10 guineas = 120 guineas, *plus* 180 guineas = 300 guineas ; Wakefield, 7 battles won at 10 guineas = 70 guineas. Net result, Preston won 300 guineas less 70 guineas = 230 guineas. The wagering would have been out of all proportion to the stakes

The rage for cocking gave use to many satires, lampoons and caricatures. A once

famous publication, *Poor Robin's Almanac*, for 1730, has this passage :—

> "Great consultations at the cock-pit about battles, duels, victories and what not. The battles proclaimed first, the victory afterwards, with a horn trumpet. But this hurry [bustle] is not at the cock-pit at Whitehall [the Privy Council], but the cock-pit at the alehouse ; not about the congress at Soissons, but in Moorfields ; not about the fighting of armies, but cocks ; where he is a great man and scarce to be spoken to, who fed and trimmed the cock that won"

Europe was at peace at the time this was written, the prolonged wars in which the Duke of Marlborough (himself an enthusiastic cocker) played so conspicuous a part, being over. The Congress of Soissons took place in 1728 ; it was attended by representatives of the European Powers, their aim being to settle many and complex questions affecting England, France, Spain, Austria, Hanover and Italy which threatened to lead to war

Moorfields, an open space until the Great Fire, was in 1666 partly built over to provide accommodation for those whose houses had been burned. The rest of the "fields" continued to be a public playground till the end of the eighteenth century or thereabout ; a

place where fairs were held, and games and sports enjoyed by not the most reputable classes of London. Cocking was carried on in the numerous alehouses near, and also in the open

An excellent picture of cock-fighting at this period is given by a French gentleman, Mons. C. de Saussure, who came on a visit to England, and whose letters to his family have been preserved.* The only point in the following passage that calls for remark is in connection with the value of a good cock; a bird of a proved strain was worth, not five or six guineas, but fifty or more. This letter was written from London on 23rd February, 1728:—

> "The birds used are of a particular breed; they are large but short legged, their feathers are scarce, they have no comb to speak of, and are very ugly to look at. Some of these fighting cocks are celebrated, and have pedigrees like gentlemen of good family, some of them being worth five or six guineas. I am told that when transported to France they degenerate, their courage and strength disappear, and they become like ordinary cocks

* *A Foreign View of England in the Reigns of George I. and George II.* By César de Saussure. (1902)

"The stage on which they fight is round and small. One of the cocks is released and struts about proudly for a few seconds. He is then caught up and his enemy appears. When the bets are made one of the cocks is placed on either end of the stage; they are armed with silver spurs, and immediately rush at each other and fight furiously. It is surprising to see the ardour, strength and courage of these little creatures, for they rarely give up till one of them is dead

"The spectators are ordinarily composed of common people, and the noise is terrible; it is impossible to hear yourself speak unless you shout. At Whitehall cock-pit, on the contrary, where the spectators are mostly persons of a certain rank, the noise is much less; but would you believe that at this place several hundred pounds are sometimes lost and won?

"Cocks will sometimes fight a whole hour before one or the other is victorious; at other times one may get killed at once. You sometimes see a cock ready to fall and apparently die, seeming to have no more strength, and suddenly it will regain all its vigour, fight with renewed courage, and kill its enemy

"Sometimes a cock will be seen vanquishing its opponent and, thinking it is dead (if

cocks can think), jump on the body of the bird and crow noisily with triumph, when the fallen bird will unexpectedly revive and slay the victor. Of course such cases are very rare, but their possibility makes the fight very exciting. Ladies never assist at these sports"

Mons. de Saussure was referring to the Royal Cock-pit when he wrote of silver spurs: these, being less fatal than spurs of steel, were always used at the St. James's resort, when the stake on the battle was £5 or more, unless special conditions were made to the contrary: the object being to prolong the fight

Daniel Defoe, writing four years earlier,* says he attended several cock matches and never saw a cock run away. He did not care about cocking, regarding it as a "remnant of the barbarous customs of this island, and too cruel" to please him, by reason of the use of steel spurs, which he says were called "gaffles"

There are in the Elsenham collection a set of six pairs of silver spurs in a sharkskin case; such a set of uniform pattern by the same maker is very rare. The initials of the maker, stamped on the blade sockets, are

**Journey through England.* (1724)

"P.C.," indicating a member of the Clay family the members of which were famed for the beauty, quality and finish of the cock spurs made by them. These spurs, of which an illustration is given, were made in 1755

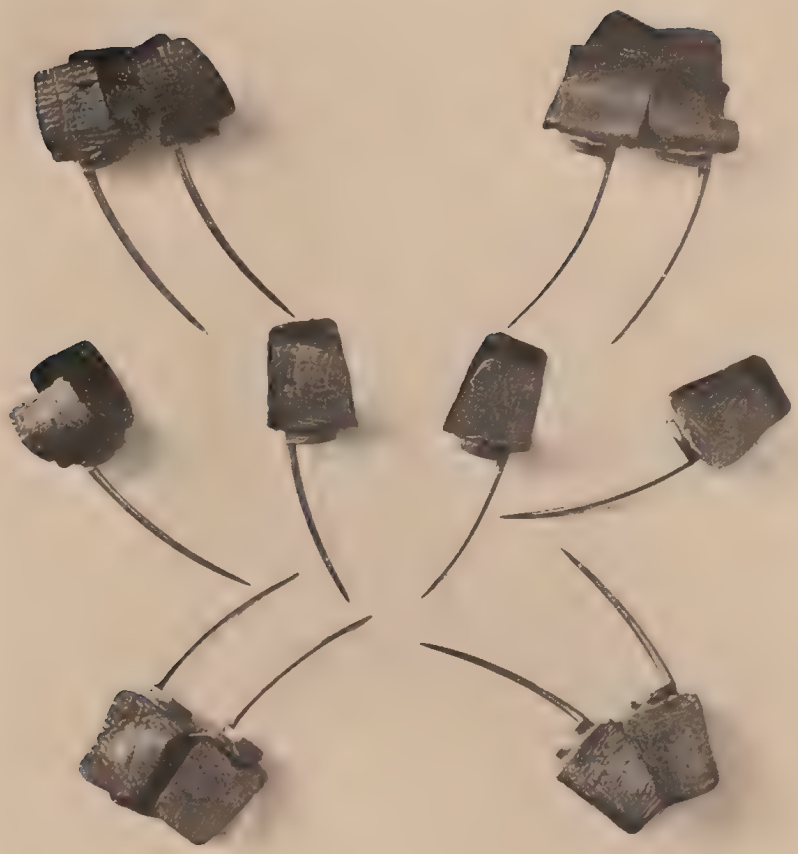
The leathers for attaching the spurs to the legs of the cock are stamped "N.P."; these were the initials of Nehemiah Paucson, one of the busiest patrons of the cock-pit at that period: he fought a number of great mains with other famous cockers of the day

The leathers are in bad repair, but the spurs remain as they were taken from the heels of the cocks which last fought in them

Defoe, like others who have recorded their impressions of cocking, refers to the continuous uproar round the pit. One writer of this or a rather later period says it was worth coming to England if only to be present at an election and a cock match; at each of which is displayed a "spirit of anarchy and confusion which words cannot paint"

Game-fowl Breeding in Georgian Times

Ideas on the subject of game-fowl breeding were changing in George II's time. The old theory, upheld by Gervaise Markham, that



Set of six pairs of Silver Spurs or "Gaffles"

[Elsenham Collection]

given a true game-hen she would produce good fowl to any barn-yard cock was still held by many, and more advanced cock masters were now endeavouring to correct it

In the year 1744, Thomas Dixon, of York, an authority at once practical and thoughtful, produced a book,* in which he sought explanation of the deeply-rooted conviction that everything depended on the hen, and gave his own sensible views on the subject.

Cocks, he points out, were continually in training, were "harassed about" by journeys, which, together with the wounds received in battle, impaired their constitutions and brought upon them the premature old age which affects vigour and reproductive power. Hens, on the other hand, were not subject to these influences and, living quietly at home, retained their constitution and breeding powers unimpaired. In a word, that hens led a natural life, whereas cocks did not

Moreover, Dixon thought the clipping of a cock for battle disturbed the natural course of moulting. "All breeders must allow that during the time of a cock's being out of feather he is liable to a great many casualties and misfortunes

* *A Treatie on the Nature and true Foundation of Breeding Cocks.* (York, 1744)

which render him incapable of shedding his feathers after a regular manner and at a proper time of the year, which if he does not it is impossible he should be healthful"

Dixon also strongly condemned the practice of breeding from "tainted fowl." There were many degrees of taint: in some cases it arose from the use of old and battle-worn cocks; in others from walking at places where the young birds were exposed to extremes of heat and cold or want of water; in others from injudicious usage when the birds came in from walk and were taken up to train

Long weapons were in vogue at this time, and their use indicated necessity for cocks with short thighs; a long thigh was weak and the bird was liable to break his own limbs by strong striking. Activity and strength were the great points at which to aim in the conformation of game-fowl. Dixon divided fighting cocks into three classes:—

(1) The active and ready-fighting cock, which if in perfect condition was the best, but if not in such condition the worst. This kind of cock always attacked at once and in such a furious manner that the designs of the foe were frustrated

Mr. George Heneage's "*Dog-kennels*, more particularly the *Right Norrils*, which were bred from the *Old Nonpariel Dog-kennel* cock and out of Sir Windsor Hemlock's hens," are cited as the best examples of this kind of fighting cock. Mr. Heneage, a Lincolnshire gentleman, was one of the foremost cockers of his day, and on occasion he fought his birds for large stakes. In 1744 he made a match with the Duke of Ancaster, to be fought at Louth in May, 1745 : 41 cocks a side, 20 guineas the battle and 1,400 guineas the main

(2) The Bull-dog kind, which was never in a hurry, was seldom known to spar, but kept its ground and stood it fairly, blow for blow, always placing a stroke where it was sure to do execution

Mr. Boston's Duckwings are cited as the best of the Bull-dog kind. They traced their descent from the Old Duckwing, bred by Smith, of Peterborough, admitted to be as fine a bird as any ever bred in England

Old Duckwing fought four years in succession at the Lincoln race meeting and at other places besides ; and in his eighth year, being then almost blind and gouty-footed, he beat a fine fresh cock in a few blows. This bird was remarkable for his great strength ; he never

fought without either breaking or bending Smith's spurs almost double. Such power, it might be thought, would be rather against the bird, since spurs might not be changed during a match.

The (3) and last kind was the Artful fighting cock: this sort always were on their guard from the moment they were pitted; they took the measure of the adversary, and if they found him "too long or too strong" for them, never allowed him a fair blow at the face; shooting off clear of danger after putting in a stroke. Such a cock had great staying power and would beat a bird much heavier and stronger than himself

The "Plimouths" of Wilkins of Grantham are mentioned as the best examples of the Artful cock, whose presence of mind was their strong point

Dixon is the first authority to advocate incestuous breeding of game-fowl; he says, brother and sister may be mated, but he thought it preferable to breed from half-brother and sister, "that is twice by the cock but from different hens," provided a year's trial of each has produced good results; or own cousins could be mated with advantage

Dixon mentions a successful cross made by Mr. Boston of Lincoln, between his Duckwings

and Downrumps; the crossing produced excellent fighting cocks, but these bred very indifferent stock, slothful and inactive. He attributes this and another failure to the mating of an Active fighter with a hen of the Bull-dog or the Artful class; and uses the lesson to insist upon the policy of incestuous breeding

The Cock Feeder

A great deal depended on the feeder from the hour the young birds were taken up for training until they were heeled for battle

The methods of the pit afforded scope for the feeder's skill. The usual system was to show and weigh cocks the day but one before the main began. Each bird was weighed to a quarter of an ounce, and as it was to the cocker's interest that his birds should weigh as light as possible, the feeder brought his cocks hungry to the scales. He could not risk weakening them by drawing the birds too fine to be weighed, and he dared not over-feed them after they had passed the scales, lest he made them unfit for battle forty-eight hours or more afterwards

The art of the feeder was shown in the skill with which he could get his birds weighed at

their lightest, and yet pit them "wound up" to the very pitch of fighting condition

Feeders varied in their attainments: some excelled in training for a short main of two or three days; others were at their best in training birds for a long main of six days

The feeder, in point of fact, occupied on the sod the same position as the modern race-horse trainer; Heber's *Calendar* of 1751 contains, with particulars of cock-matches fought and arranged, the names of the feeders in some cases, thus indicating recognition of the importance of their part in cock-fighting

When county fought county all the birds destined for the match were placed in the care of the county feeder. Thus in 1750, matches were arranged between Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, the first to be fought at Cirencester in Easter week, the return match at "Cricklet" (Cricklade) in Whitsun week: 41 cocks a side, 10 guineas the battle and 200 the main; the feeder for Wiltshire was Mr. Cope and for Gloucestershire, Mr. Wagstaff

Mains between Counties and Towns

Neither George I nor George II took any personal interest in the cock-pit, but lack of royal example in no way affected the general

"Now, Master George, what do you think of the **black breasted red?**"

[*After* Henry Alken *Book of Prints*, Published by Thos. McLean, 1823]

popularity of cocking. The newspapers of the time bear witness to the number of matches in the large towns of the kingdom. These appealed to every class, and were held in very various places

Thus on 6th May, 1744, the *Daily Advertiser* announces cocking at the Two Brewers, Hockley in the Hole (Clerkenwell), for "a large sow and ten pigs" or their value, no cock to exceed 4 lbs. 1 oz. In 1747 *Aris's Gazette* notifies a match, 41 cocks a side between Warwickshire and Worcestershire, at Duddeston Hall, near Birmingham, 10 guineas a battle and 200 guineas the main; also 21 cocks a side to fight byes for 2 guineas each

In these inter-county or inter-town mains the birds were generally the property of a number of joint subscribers, but leading cockers sometimes lent birds to do battle

The Earl of Derby used to lend birds to fight for Lancashire against Cheshire. The cocks were chosen of medium weight, 3 lbs. 8 ozs. to 4 lbs. 10 ozs., in order to ensure as many battles and as few byes as possible; and the combatants were often matched to a drachm weight. At the second of a series of seven annual matches fought by Birmingham against Bridgenorth (1761) of sixty-one cocks weighed, fifty-eight were matched

With a few exceptions 200 guineas was the largest stake on a main ; occasionally it might be 400 guineas, but by far the greater amount of money changed hands in bets

In the town cocking was essentially an evening amusement, that it might be accessible to those who were occupied during the day ; but at pits patronised by men of leisure and on holidays at public resorts "play" might begin at eleven or at noon. Nominally the cocking season opened with Shrovetide and coincided with the racing season ; in practice cocking went on all the year round

Rules of Cock-fighting

The "Rules and Orders for Cocking," observed at this period (1751), are given in Appendix A. The matter-of-fact way in which is set forth the method of "setting to" cocks, one or both of which might have lost its sight, is eloquent of the callous spirit of the age. So long as a cock would fight—and a true game-cock would fight to the last gasp—the injuries it received were merely regarded as impairing prospects of winning, It is not surprising that cocking had its resolute opponents among the more enlightened of our ancestors

Perhaps, however, the point that first strikes the reader of these nineteen rules is only six of them apply to cock-fighting itself. Three (Nos. VIII, XV and XVII) apply to the conduct and control of the audience, while the remaining ten rules deal with betting and the quarrels that might arise out of it. This circumstance lends colour to the frequent complaints made by the opponents of cocking to the effect that it gave rise to dispute and riot

Cock-fighting and Disorder

There is ample evidence to prove that in districts where cock-fighting was particularly popular, as in the "Black Country," serious troubles occurred. At Wednesbury, in Staffordshire, always a great place for the sport, the authorities in 1750 gave public notice that "on account of the many disorders and furious riots" which took place in the alehouses after cock-fighting, any publican who allowed the sport on his premises should lose his licence, and that all cockers caught stirring up mischief or inciting to riot should be whipped at the common whipping-post

Six years later the Darlaston authorities issued warning that "felonies and disorders"

at cock-fights or similar assemblies would be prosecuted. Darlaston was another famous cocking centre. Mr. Hackwood states that when the town wished to bring about a cocking match with the neighbouring town of Willenhall, or *vice versa*, a man would go out carrying a game-cock which he held up towards the weathercock on the church steeple of the other town ; this gesture meant a challenge, and it was never refused

Cocking in the Midlands

The Birmingham papers in George II's time gave as much space to the description of a cock match as to the trials at Assizes, to royal birthday celebrations and other events of public interest. Advertisements remain to show the frequency of meetings at Bridgnorth, Stoke, Worcester, Wellington, Dudley, Lichfield, in a word of all the towns within a day's journey of Birmingham : the Wednesbury cockings were famed, and the Preston race meetings for a long period were noted for the mains that were fought there

Duddeston Hall was to the Midlands what the London cock-pits were to the South. County mains were fought there for many years ; and there was an annual subscription

main on New Year's day and the day following

George III. and Cocking

William Hogarth's picture "The Cock-pit" (facing page 50) painted in 1759, is the best known work of the kind. The scene is the Royal Cock-pit, as appears from the Royal Arms on the wall, and the principal figure is Lord Albemarle Bertie who, in spite of blindness, was an ardent cocker. Round the pit the artist shows an audience carefully selected to show persons of every grade of society; the person upon whose back a gallows is rudely chalked is supposed to be the public hangman, but the device might equally be meant to indicate a criminal. The shadow of the basket which has been raised to the roof with its occupant is seen upon the pit

Although George III kept game-cocks and had the famous feeder Joseph Gilliver, there is nothing in the numerous memoirs of his time to show that this king ever entered a cock-pit. Gilliver fought the royal birds in the royal pit at Windsor, but it need hardly be said that the proceeding does not necessarily imply royal interest. Cocking was the national sport in the most sweeping sense of the term

No sport has ever held the same place in the affections of the English people; and game-cocks in those days were as naturally an appanage of Royalty as a racing stud in our own time. They were kept as an evidence of the sovereign's interest in the amusements of his people, and so far as history reveals, George III found no more personal interest in the Royal game-cocks and their doings in the pit than did the Sailor King William IV in the Royal stud of thoroughbreds and their doings on the turf

London Cocking in George III's Time

The patronage of the throne was not required to preserve the vitality of cocking. It flourished as vigorously as ever all over the country. A map of London dated 1761, has the following evidence of the number of pits or resorts identified with cocking: "Cock Alleys" were ten in number; "Cock Courts" nine; "Cock Yards" eight; "Cock Lanes" four

In addition to these there were Cock Hill, Cockpit Alley, Cockpit Buildings, Cockpit Street, Court, and Yard, Cocks' Rents and, not least, Cockspur Street, which derived its name from the fact that the best known makers

of cock spurs, Clay, Smith, Foulmin, Garfield and others, carried on their business there

There was in Drury Lane a cock-pit notorious for the disorderly character of those who frequented it. The London apprentices, "virtuous by custom immemorial," as Sir Walter Besant observes* with gentle irony, used to wreck this cock-pit every Shrove Tuesday; just as in Charles II's time they wrecked houses of ill-fame in Moorfields

Another notorious London cock-pit in George III's time was that in Pickled Egg Walk, Clerkenwell. County mains took place at this pit; the Gentlemen of London fought the Gentlemen of Essex, and the cockers of Middlesex fought those of Wiltshire here in 1775, for example. But such matches were only occasional features in the regular programme of the house, which ordinarily was a favourite resort of rogues and vagabonds

In 1774, what would now be called an "open letter" was addressed to the celebrated Magistrate, Sir John Fielding, in the *Public Advertiser*, calling upon him to close the Pickled Egg Walk Cock-pit, because "the very dregs assemble there two or three times a week to fight cocks and gamble"

* *Survey of London*

Agitation Against Cocking

The more humane among the population had always strongly condemned cocking, and during George III's reign many were the pamphlets written and sermons preached against it. There are in the Elsenham Library a few such pamphlets or tracts, intended to strike terror into the minds of those who bore part in cocking; the usual form is an "authentic narrative of a cock-fighter" who came by sudden death

A wiser note is struck in a pamphlet of 1761, entitled *Clemency to Brutes*, which appeals to the humane instincts of the reader. The Methodists, seeking as they did the moral improvement of the lower classes, were particularly active in the warfare against cocking. It is recorded of John Wesley that during a preaching tour in Cornwall he arrived at Gwenap's Pit* at a moment when a main was actually in progress. The famous preacher waited quietly until the fight was over and then delivered his address

* Gwenap's Pit is on a hill near Redruth; it is said to be the oldest and the largest in England. The pit, or fighting arena, is 13 feet in diameter, and round it rise twelve tiers of seats, stoned faced, 18 inches high and 3 feet wide. It is surrounded at the top by a wall, 150 yards in circumference This structure is considered to date from pre-Roman times.

Public feeling, however, still warmly upheld the cocker as it upheld bull and bear baiting and dog-fighting. Hutchinson in his *History of Cumberland*, 1794, states that the principal amusements of the people were wrestling and cock-fighting

When the law interfered it was in the interests of peace ; the Walsall authorities, in 1789, threatened ale-house keepers with forfeiture of their licences if they encouraged or abetted bull-baiting or cock-fighting ; but for the same reason that the Wednesbury and Darlaston Authorities had taken the step in previous years—simply because the proceedings so frequently ended in riot

Among the vast majority, the idea of humanity was literally non-existent. A Shrewsbury cocker laid a wager that a cock of his breeding would fight, though on fire, and, drenching the unfortunate bird with turpentine, set it alight in the pit. This incident was cited as proof of the game-cock's extraordinary courage and passion for fighting, and not as proof of man's brutality

Popularity of Cocking

It was the spirit of the age. It is very difficult for us to realise how great was the

place in the life of our ancestors held by cock fighting. Many among the clergy took active part in the sport; it was not unusual when town beat town in a long main to ring the church bells in celebration of the victory. Travellers would arrange with the coachman that the stage coach should wait over the night if there were a cock-fight in any town on the road. Apprentices were forbidden to keep game-cocks during the first seven years of their indentures

The relative importance attached to racing and cocking is shown by an incident which occurred at Chester in 1834. It was represented to the Executive of the race meeting that the battles in the pit were likely to be well fought and prolonged, and that the main would not be over at the hour fixed to begin racing. The Clerk of the Course made no demur to post-ponement of the first race till three o'clock

George Roberts* mentions the building of a special posting carriage at a cost of £500 to bring certain cocks up from Cornwall to fight in London. The evil effects of travel on fighting birds has already been noticed, and this was an endeavour to bring them to the pit in good trim

* *Social History of the Southern Counties of England.* (1856)

Famous Cockers

Space has forbidden notice of individual cockers, but mention must be made of the 12th Earl of Derby for two reasons: first, because he was recognised as the foremost cocker of his time, holding his own with the Knowsley breed of Black-breasted Reds, famous for nearly 300 years, throughout his long life; and second, because he was the last English peer to take prominent part in the sport

Succeeding to the title at the age of twelve years Lord Derby came of age in 1775, and throughout his life was devoted to cocking. He built a pit at Preston at his own expense (in 1868 this building had been converted into a temperance hall), and he always fought his birds at the Preston and Liverpool race meetings

Lord Derby's great antagonist was General Yates, whose breed of cocks was considered equal to that of Knowsley. The usual stake on the main was 1,000 guineas, but it was frequently 2,000 and even 3,000 guineas. After General Yates died, Mr. Thomas Leigh and Mr. Houghton (afterwards Sir Henry Houghton) were the cockers against whom Lord Derby often pitted his birds

Lord Derby's name first occurs in the cock-fighting returns of the *Racing Calendar* for

1790, when his cocks fought Mr. Wharton's at Preston races and beat them. Richardson was his feeder at that time. He owed his subsequent career of success to Paul Potter, one of the most skilful feeders of the time, and afterwards to Potter's son. When Lord Derby died, at the age of 82, in 1834, all his birds, spurs, bags, and fighting equipment became the property of the younger Potter, who thenceforward kept a tavern at Hartlebury

Cock bags were usually made of linen; Lord Derby's were of silk, with a fighting cock embroidered in colours. Wealthy cockers frequently had bags of velvet with their family crest embroidered thereon. "County" bags were made of velvet or silk, adorned with gold lace and some appropriate device. For carrying cocks on horseback in cold weather, bags lined with flannel were sometimes used

Training in George III's Time

The system of training* at this time had undergone further changes; the least valuable stags of a brood were armed with short silver spurs and pitted against one another, to prove the courage and gameness of their brothers.

* Condensed from Thos. Bourne's article in Rees' *Cyclopædia.* (1808)

"THE COCK-PIT ROYAL, 1796"

The training of birds intended for the pit occupied eight or ten days in place of the long preparation favoured by cockers of 1600-1700, and the old plan of sweating or "stoving" had been abandoned

A cock, if well walked, would come up in good condition, but too fat to fight, and needed reducing. His tail and spurs having been cut, he was put into his pen. The first day was one of starvation to prepare him for the purging physic he was to receive on the second day; after physic he was allowed to spar, his cut spurs muffled, with another cock till he showed signs of weariness, when he was restored to his pen and given a large teacup of warm food, bread and milk sweetened with sugar candy. The food eaten, he was shut up closely till next morning

On the third morning, his pen having been cleaned out and his feet carefully cleaned, he was given a meal of cock bread, for which this was the recipe: to 3 lbs. of fine flour, two eggs, four whites of eggs and a little yeast; knead with water and well bake. Of this the bird received a teacupful of small pieces twice in the day. Water was considered injurious; on the fourth day, early in the morning, he got half a teacup of barley and a little water in which toast had been steeped. His pen was

left uncovered for an hour; in the afternoon he was given another half cup of barley, but no water. On the fifth day, three meals of cock bread, but no water

The sixth was "weighing day"; early in the morning the bird received some cock bread. After he had passed the scales, he was given a good meal of barley and water, and sometimes a little minced sheep's heart. On the seventh day his morning meal was barley, that in the afternoon cock bread and the white of a hard boiled egg; also a little water

Throughout this course of training he was kept quiet in a room from which light was excluded for the greater part of the day

On the eighth day he received about forty grains of barley, and was then prepared for the pit: he was "cut out" for fighting, *i.e.*, wings rounded, hackle and saddle feathers cut shorter, feathers about the vent cut close off, and the feathers of the tail cropped, leaving only the vane or fan whose length was reduced by half. He was then ready to be "shown" in the pit, preliminary to being heeled for fighting

This was the course of preparation for eight days; but ten days was the more usual period. Eight ounces was as much as any cock should gain or lose during the training

As the cocks in a main were pitted according to weight, the lightest fighting first and the heaviest last, there was time to feed up the larger and heavier birds between weighing day and the day they were to fight. As said on a former page, the cock might be fed as the owner pleased after the bird had been weighed, and the licence thus allowed gave scope for the exercise of the feeder's art

Some skill was required to "heel" the cock properly ; if the spurs were fastened too tightly the bird's perfect freedom of movement would be affected ; if too loosely, the spurs might be displaced or broken at the critical moment. The aim was to place the spur exactly in the line of the natural weapon, which had been clipped

The "General Rules and Orders for Cocking" in force at this time will be found in Appendix B

"Subscription" Mains

There appears to have been what would now be called a "boom" in London cocking, about 1790-1800. Mr. Ralph Nevill, in his recent book * on gaming, states that more subscription mains were fought at the Royal cock-pit in

* *Light Come, Light go.* (1907)

1793 than had been seen there for many years

A "subscription main" was one in which a number of cockers entered one, two or more birds each; the birds being paired to fight by drawing lots. Among the London cock-pits of which mention is made about this time or during the first decades of the nineteenth century are the Moss Alley, Bankside, Southwark, New Pit, Hoxton, and Little Grosvenor Street, Millbank. This last is mentioned in 1831 as the "New Royal Cock-pit"

Cock-fighting during the Regency

Among the leading cockers of this period were the Duke of Northumberland, the Duke of Hamilton and the Earl of Mexborough, Lord Vere and Lord Lonsdale: Lord Derby's prominent part has been already noticed

In 1814, Lord Lonsdale organised a main for the benefit of the Allied Sovereigns. In 1817, the Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia, accompanied by the Duke of Devonshire, the Russian Ambassador, Sir Wm. Congreve, Baron Nichola, General Kutusoff and others went to the Cock-pit Royal and spent an hour and a half watching five battles, in which the Russian visitors were greatly interested, never before having seen a cock-fight *

* *Social England in the Regency*. By John Ashton

George IV, when Prince Regent, was exceedingly fond of the cock-pit. It is said that on one occasion he and the Duke of York lost so much money over a main, that they had to send out to a neighbouring tavern to borrow what was necessary to pay their losses. The keeper of the tavern was given a free licence in recognition of this service to royalty

In the year 1814, appeared a little book,* now rare and much prized by collectors, which gives an admirable account of the methods of the cock master during the Regency

This work was written by W. Sketchley of Nottingham as the fruit of fifty years' experience. The intending cocker who proposed to establish a breed of his own, is advised to seek every opportunity of being present at regular mains, and seeing well-bred brothers whose mode of fighting is good ; they must be steady, good heelers, of ready mouth and "deep game." Brothers would not always prove equally good ; but if close in-bred to a regular set of sisters, this might be expected to correct any defects in the progeny

Black-reds were most esteemed, but different breeds were preferred in various parts of the

* *The Cocker.* By W. Sketchley

country, namely Piles, Black-reds, Silver black-breasted Ducks (or Duckwings), Birchin Ducks, Dark Greys, Mealy Greys, Blacks, Spangles, Furnaces, Pole-cats, Cuckoos, Gingers, Red Duns, Duns and Smokey Duns: there were good birds in all these breeds. Cheshire Piles had always been favourites. Sketchley also had a high opinion of Shropshire Reds

The Piles were eminently distinguished for their "deadly heel"; the lighter coloured Piles wielded their weapons in a more dangerous direction than any other strain of game-fowl, but by reason of their delicacy of constitution they were liable to degenerate

In and in breeding too long continued, serious loss of blood in a fight, and undiscovered internal injuries during a fight were the causes of constitutional defects in progeny. The two latter causes led to the preference of a maiden-cock over a "fought cock" for breeding purposes

A great point to aim at was uniformity; it was considered a great mistake to mate a cock, because he was a good one, with hens unlike himself. When a cocker pitted a "regular set of brothers" so like one another that it was hard to distinguish between them, their

uniformity always drew a round of applause from the spectators

Youth on both sides was most desirable in mating ; if stags were put to two-year-old hens, and cocks to pullets, the breeder might safely continue in the same blood for years, provided he never used cock or hen after the bird was two years old

The Earl of Derby's success is cited as proving the importance of regular breeding on a proved system and careful attention. From four to six hens were allowed to each cock. "Full blood" mating was approved; father with daughter, mother with son, brother with sister. Something about character might be learned from the cock's treatment of his hens ; if he bullied them he might be suspected as a coward

Birds of high bearing were preferred to "low setting" cocks ; they always had odds in their favour as fighters. Sketchley did not like the "shifty" or artful cock, even though the bird of this class did sometimes win his battle. He mentions the prowess of a Ginger Red he possessed about the year 1772 ; this bird fought five mains in one year without injury

Here it may be noted that cock masters who long survived the legal prohibition of the sport attributed the superior quality of the table poultry they knew in their youth, partially at least, to the fact that game-fowls were bred in great numbers and always from young birds. The promising cock was taken up at two years old for the pit and his place as brood cock taken by a stag. Thus our fathers and grandfathers were constantly breeding from young, healthy, vigorous birds of the most perfect shape and conformation

Much importance was attached to intimate knowledge by the feeder of the birds in his care; the more experience the man had with his employer's cocks the greater the prospect of success. Sketchley attributes the fact that his own Black Reds won five out of six mains against Mr. Cussans' Greys at Loughborough and Derby, to his retention throughout of John Beestal as his feeder, whereas Mr. Cussans discharged his feeder and engaged a new one for each main

Cocks were very liable to change in constitution if moved from the country of their birth. Sketchley's remark in this sense must be understood as applying to the movement of birds from one district in England to another;

but it recalls Mons. de Saussure's statement, given on page 61, that game-cocks lose their courage when exported to France

Sketchley lays stress on the necessity for trying cocks, as opposed to the trials of stags advocated by earlier authorities. A trial of stags (as recommended in Rees's *Cyclopædia*) was not in his opinion to be depended on to show how the youngsters would turn out. He objected to March battles, as the birds had not at that time of the year reached their best; he adds that birds are "now (1814) at least two months later in completing their feather than they were thirty years ago," and the 1st of June was early enough to pit cocks in independent mains

There are some interesting suggestions also, in a small book entitled "Directions for Breeding Game Cocks including instructions for the choice of a Cock and Hens to breed from; with calculations for Betting, &c., &c.," the second edition of which was published in 1818. I have not been able to discover when the book was first published

Search among old records fails to reveal any particulars of the main fought at Lincoln in 1815, for which Joseph Gilliver "fed" the birds of one cocker. This main consisted of

seven battles, of which Gilliver won five, and is famous in cocking annals by reason of the sums staked, £1,000 on each battle and £5,000 the main

Cocking in George IV's Reign

London cocking seems to have declined during the reign of George IV (1820-1830), though the Sovereign took great interest in the sport and kept game-cocks, under Gilliver's care; but there was soon a revival. A correspondent of the *Sporting Magazine* of 1830 writes, that as "cocking has now become so much more patronised in town than some years past," he hopes the editor will give more detailed accounts of mains

After the destruction of the old Royal Cock-pit, Dartmouth Street, in 1816, the Royal Cock-pit in Tufton Street became the head-quarters of cocking; a three days main between Middlesex and Gloucestershire was fought there in February, 1830. The Tufton Street pit was the only place where * long mains and great subscription matches were fought at this time in London. This pit, which was built by subscription, was circular; in the centre was a

* *Cocking and Its Votaries.* By S. A. T. (1885)

mound of earth about 20 feet across, surrounded by boarding to prevent the birds falling off, and covered with matting. There were six tiers of seats, and behind the uppermost a gallery, where spectators might stand

In 1830 also a West country cocker challenged All England to fight for seven successive years, 10 guineas a battle and 200 guineas the main, in any London pit, the meeting to take place during the week before Epsom Races

Infinite care was taken of cocks on a journey at this period. When Thomas Bourne, the celebrated feeder who wrote, or dictated, the article on cocking published in Rees' *Cyclopædia*, fed for Colonel Buller, he had on one occasion to convey cocks from Cheltenham to fight a main for £1,000 at Plymouth. He took the birds in a van and spent nine days on the journey, travelling at a walk with men in front to remove from the road all large and loose stones that might jolt the conveyance with the cocks! *

Nothing more clearly illustrates the mental attitude of the public mind towards cock-fighting

* It must be borne in mind that the roads of England in those days were very different from the roads of our own time. Some information on this subject will be found in *Early Carriages and Roads*, published by me in 1903. The description of a highroad by the famous agriculturist, Arthur Young, will be found on page 89 of that work

at this period than the fact that the clergy still bore active part in it, not only without reproach, but with the same freedom as they might hunt or shoot. A noteworthy cocker for nearly fifty years was Professor John Wilson, known by his writings as "Christopher North": Wilson frequented the cock-pit regularly during his Oxford days from 1803 to 1807; when he settled at Elleray on the shores of Windermere he devoted much time and care to breeding game-fowl, and on at least one occasion fought a main in his drawing-room

When he became Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, a position modern ideas would regard as wholly incompatible even with countenance of the sport, he continued his interest in cocking, and in his leisure hours was generally to be seen with a cock under his arm. Professor Wilson died in 1854

The number of persons addicted to the sport in the twenties may be inferred from Captain Ross' experience when he accepted Lord Kennedy's challenge to a cock match in 1825. Captain Ross asked Dr. Wing, who lived near Melton, to lend him birds; Dr. Wing placed all his cocks at Captain Ross' disposal and mentioned the matter to friends; with the

Tom Hines, the Birmingham Cock-setter

result that between 300 and 400 of the best birds in England were brought in to Melton, that a selection might be made. The opening chapters of *Silk and Scarlet*, by The Druid (H. H. Dixon), bear witness to the prevalence of cocking in Leicestershire

A feature in the method of reporting cock-fights during George III's reign and later deserves a word of notice; instead of heading the record of battles and byes with the names of the owners, those of the feeders were inserted

To take a comparatively late example, when Lancashire fought Cheshire at the Liverpool Race Meeting in July, 1836, Hines, feeder for the former county, was credited with 27 battles and 12 byes, while Woodcock, feeder for Cheshire, was credited with 12 battles and 8 byes

The practice demonstrates the great importance which attached to the work of the feeder when the treatment of game-fowl became fully understood. Tom Hines, mentioned above, was a Birmingham man, famed as a feeder and cock setter. During the last fifty or sixty years of legal cocking the feeder appears to have made over the duty of "setting to" the cocks in the pit to a colleague or helper

who was called the "setter-to." The rules, given on page 108 (Appendix B), bear evidence of comparatively modern remodelling in their reference to this official

Last Days of Cocking

After Queen Victoria's accession in 1837, a tide of opinion against cock-fighting set in, and as a public spectacle it ceased to be fashionable. One of the last mains fought publicly in London, so far as some search has revealed, took place in Battersea Fields in the year 1840, Lord Berkeley being one of the cockers, and William Gilliver, son of Joseph, the other

This was in some sort an evasion of the Act of 1833, "For the More Effectual Administration of Justice in London"; a law which made an end of houses for bear-baiting and cock-fighting within five miles of Temple Bar, and necessarily put an end to public cocking in London

The *Racing Calendar* of 1840 contained the last cocking report published in that work; it refers to a main fought at the Liverpool July Meeting between Tom Hines and Potter, son of Paul Potter, who died in 1833, 5 sovereigns a battle and 200 sovereigns the main. Only the feeders' names are given, but this must not

be taken to mean that the birds belonged to persons who wished to conceal their names

Potter, as before stated, had become possessor of the birds and cocking outfit belonging to his old master, Lord Derby, after the latter's death, and it is quite likely that both he and Hines were the actual owners of the birds fought

Cock-fighting as a sport openly followed came to an end in 1849, under "An Act for the More effective Prevention of Cruelty to Animals" * which forbade the keeping of house or place for baiting or fighting animals. But it "died hard," John Harris, the Cornish cocker, to whose *Life and Letters* several references have been made, says that the Easter cocking of 1850, between Norfolk and Suffolk, a four days main, was "the greatest meeting ever held in England"

There was an Easter cocking at the Gallowgate Pit, Newcastle, in 1850, which lasted ten days; there were some 300 entries, and most of the programme consisted of 16 cock Welsh mains for 50 guineas each. The Welsh main was the usual method of cocking in the Carlisle district. The last Gold Cup fought for in

* 12 and 13 Vic., c. 92, sec. 3

England was at Newcastle. The mains were fought from 1853 to 1854

Harris says, he thinks "the last list published was Easter, 1867." This list apparently referred to a North Country meeting

In 1875, a main was fought at Brawnton between Paignton and Alnwick. Harris tells a story of an interrupted main at Preston. Among the spectators was the Mayor, and when the police appeared the Mayor tried to hide in the chimney ; he was too stout to do more than get half way ; and it was said the officers of the law recognized the Chief Magistrate's nether extremities and refrained from helping him down

Harris used to travel all over the Kingdom, after the Act of 1849 was passed, to serve his numerous patrons. It was for long the custom to hold mains in private houses as an after-dinner entertainment for guests. Harris died, at the age of 80, in February, 1910

Illegal Cock-fighting

Cock-fighting is still carried on quietly, more particularly in the Northern Counties, where, a Cumberland friend maintains, the people still "wrestle all day and fight cocks all night."

Now and again cases of cock-fighting are detected by the police or the agents of the R.S.P.C.A. and legal proceedings follow

A test case was decided in 1863 by the Court of Appeal (Morley and others *v.* Greenhalgh): the cockers were convicted of an offence under 12 and 13 Vic., and successfully appealed on the ground that the old stone quarry where the main was fought did not constitute a "place" within the meaning of the Act. It being obvious that the old quarry was not "kept" for cocking, the conviction was necessarily quashed

Another case in the same year which excited considerable feeling was that against the Marquis of Hastings, who fought a main on his own premises at Castle Donington

The last famous case of illegal cocking in London took place on 21st April, 1865, when the proprietor of the Queen's Head Tavern, Queen's Head Passage, Great Windmill Street, was summoned for allowing a cock-fight on his premises, and a large number of participators and onlookers of all social grades were summoned for "abetting." The defendants, by the way, included W. Gilliver, grandson of the Royal feeder to George III and IV. All were convicted and fined £5

The Gallowgate Pit attached to the Bay Horse Inn, Newcastle-on-Tyne, was the last public pit used in England; there is every reason to suppose that mains were fought there, without undue ostentation, for many years after the passing of the Act of 1849: but the place escaped the attention of the authorities until 1874 when it was "raided" by the police

As a legal sport, or at least as one which the law was not empowered to put down, cocking continued in Scotland until recent years, though apparently it was not often practised. In April, 1895, nine battles were fought in a field near Bishopton in Renfrewshire before a large crowd; the affair was carried through without concealment and without hindrance, the High Court of Justiciary in Edinburgh having ruled, in 1892, that cocking was not illegal. Attention was drawn to the matter in the House of Commons, and the Lord Advocate promised a Bill to make the law of Scotland uniform with that of England

Modern Sale of Cock Spurs

A sale of cock spurs and other matters connected with the sport took place in June, 1903, at Messrs. Sothebys. The spurs included some curiosities. One pair illustrated the

fashion in which the old rules were sometimes evaded; as said on an earlier page, the usual system was to fight matches in silver spurs; the lot 77 consisted of steel spurs with silver sheaths, which were slipped off by the setter-to at the last moment. A spur with one cutting edge was probably a relic of Queen Anne's time, when "penknife" spurs were sometimes used. Some forty pairs of spurs were disposed of at this sale, bringing an aggregate of £70

Spurs, it may be observed, were highly valued in old days. Sets of spurs remained in the same family for generations, bequeathed by will from father to son

Game-fowls are bred in great numbers all over England, and the practice of putting the birds out at walks probably still exists. Sir Humphrey de Trafford used to insert in leases the clause requiring tenants to walk game-cocks, and the walks were stocked so lately as 1895

Superstitions of the Cock-pit

Many and curious were the superstitions which pervaded the cock-pit. The practice of placing game-fowls' eggs in a magpie's nest to be hatched out is very old; it seems to have had origin in the superstition which placed the

magpie under the special protection of the Evil One; game-cocks thus hatched were called "devil's birds" and regarded as unconquerable

The use of a magpie's nest for this purpose was common, but by no means always indicated the user's belief in supernatural advantages. There is in the *Annals of Sporting* for 1824, mention of a Welsh main, in which sixteen birds were engaged, won by a cock that had been hatched out in the nest of a magpie in the owner's orchard

This win gave rise to discussion concerning the merits of magpie-hatched game-fowl. An old feeder of the Cock-pit Royal, Westminster, maintained that cocks so hatched were impudent and foolhardy and more inclined to fight at the setter's hand than to attack the foe in the pit. Some experts thought birds hatched by a magpie were particularly strong and courageous; others that they were wild and shy—grave faults in a fighting-cock

Returning to superstitions: Another very strange idea * held in Shropshire was that bread which had been consecrated for the Holy Communion would give unrivalled strength and stamina to the cock that ate it: and to obtain possession, cockers would attend at the altar

* *Shropshire Folklore*. By Georgina F. Jackson. (1883)

and secrete the morsel of bread given them by the officiating clergyman

Again, it was firmly believed that if the dust swept from the communion table were sprinkled on the pit, this would avert all evil influences and charms and ensure victory to the best bird, by which, we may safely infer, was meant the bird owned by him who sprinkled the dust

The Wellington miners attributed the same mysterious quality to earth from the nearest graveyard : a little of which sprinkled on the pit made victory to the best cock certain

Modern Use of Old Cock-pits

Many cock-pits remain in England, converted to various uses. The County Pit at Truro, in a six-sided building, said to have been the first enclosed cock-pit in Cornwall, is now a spirit vault. The Chester pit is a sugar factory, that at Carlisle a foundry. Most singular to modern ideas is the old Canterbury Corporation Pit: this is part of the old St. Augustine's Abbey, and until as lately as 1813 was rented by the proprietor of an hotel close by. The late John Harris states that the last Corporation cock-pit to witness a main was that at Lichfield.

APPENDIX A

RULES AND ORDERS FOR COCKING*

Imprimis. It is agreed That every man having Cocks to fight, shew and put them into the Pit with a fair Hackle, not too near shorn or cut, or any other brand, under pain of forfeiting, for every time so offending, Three shillings and Four pence; and his Cock to be *put by* from Fighting that Year

II Item. That every Cock matched shall fight as he is first shewed in the Pit, without *sheering* or *cutting* any Feathers afterwards to a Disadvantage, without the consent of both Parties that made the Match, upon pain of forfeiting, for every time so offending, ten shillings

III Item. That when two Cocks are set down to fight, *and one of them run away* before they have struck *three Mantling Blows*, it is adjudged *no Battle to the Bettors*

IV Item. That in all Matches none shall presume to set to, but those appointed by the *Masters of the Match*

V Item. That when a *Battle* come to setting to, and both Cocks refuse to fight ten times, according to the Law, then a *fresh Cock* to be hovell'd and set to each Cock; and if one fight and the other refuse, then the fighting Cock to *win the Battle;* but if both fight or both refuse, then to be *a drawn Battle*

Item. That the crowing of a cock on Mantling in his *Battle*, shall be adjudged no fight: and if both be

*From *An Historical List of Horse Matches Run in 1751.* Reginald Heber. It is not possible to say for how many years these rules had then been in force

blind, although they peck and fight, yet they shall be set to, telling the Law betwixt every time

VI Item. That when Cocks are far spent and come to setting together, it is ordered, That they shall be set to as followeth (that is to say) *Bill to Bill if they both see:* but if either be blind, then the *blind Cock to touch;* if either be drawn neck'd, then his *Head to be held fair*, and even with the other Cock, so that the Party do his best in setting to, to make his Cock fight: *Provided* That after they come to be set thus as aforesaid, between every setting to they shall stay till one tell *Twenty* before they are set to again, until the *Law* of two times are forth, and then to tell *Ten* but ten times

VII Item. It is ordered that when a Cock is so hurt that any of the Pit shall lay ten Pounds to five shillings, that after the Cocks fighting shall be told twice twenty, and if no Man will take that Lay, then the *Battle* to be adjudged won on that Cock's side the Odds is on

VIII Item. That no Man shall make any Cavil or Speech about Matching of Cocks, either to the Matchers or the Owners of the Cocks after the Cocks be once put together; upon pain of forfeiting five shillings for every time so offending

IX Item. That all Losses in the Cockpit be presently paid down at the End of every Battle before any other be fought; or else that the Party winning be satisfied before the party losing go out of Doors: and also that every Man pay good current Money

X Item. Whosoever they be which shall put any Lay or *Bett* to Judgment, being in variance, they both shall stake down the Money laid on either side, and Sixpence a piece over, and the Party that is adjudg'd to be in the wrong shall pay his *Bett*, and lose his Sixpence: *Provided* That every man speak freely before

Judgment given, what he thinks thereof: and if any Man speak afterwards, he shall, for every such offence in speaking, pay Sixpence

XI Item. That all Betts made either within or without the Pit shall stand good: and that one cannot go off without consent of the other, and all Betts undemanded before the next Battle fights, to be lost

XII Item. If *any* Man have made a *Lay* or *Bett*, and cannot tell, or call to mind with whom he laid or betted such a *Lay*, then if he desire openly in the Pit that the Party with whom he laid would give him the one half of the same, if he doth not confess it, and give him the one half of the same, then it is allowed anyone that knows the Bett to declare it, and the Party so *refusing to confess* it, shall pay the whole Bett: *Provided* That no Man may tell before the Party said he is contended to take as aforesaid; but if any man do tell him before the Party said he is content to take the Half of his *Bett* then the Party so telling is to pay the said Lay or Bett

XIII Item. If any Man lay more Money than he hath to pay, or cannot satisfy the Party with whom he hath laid, either by his Credit or some Friend's Word: the which if he cannot do, then he is to be put into a Basket to be provided for that purpose, and to be hanged up in that Basket in some convenient Place in the Cock-pit that all men may know him, during the time of Play that Day; and also the Party so offending never to be *admitted* to come into the *Pit* until he hath made satisfaction

XIV Item. That if any Man in a Pit shall profer a *Bett* and the Party that lays with him say *Done*, and he answers *Done* to him again, it shall be judged a lawfull Bett

XV Item. It is ordered, That Persons of the better Rank and Quality of the *Cockers*, *Cock Masters* and

Gamesters, such as are appointed to set to Cocks and put them fair in and no others (*without permission of the Master of the Pit*) shall set in the lower Ring; and that the said Master of the Pit shall have Authority at all times to remove such as he thinks not meet to set in the lower or second Ring: and also make room for those that are of the better sort and to place them there at his pleasure according to his Discretion

XVI Item. It is ordered, That all *Controversies* which arise or come by means of the *Sport of Cock-fighting* upon any of the Orders above written, or otherwise between Party and Party, shall be determined by the Master of the Pit where the said *Controversy* did arise, with Six or Four of the ancient and best experienced Gamesters there, being called *by the Consent* of *both Parties*, to assert him therein

XVII Item. That none shall strike or draw Weapon to strike any Man upon pain, for every time so offending of Forty Shillings

XVIII Item. For the better observation of all the Orders before written, *It is ordered and agreed* That if any Person shall offend in *any* of the said *Premises*, *he presently pay his Forfeiture;* the which being adjudged, if he shall refuse to do, then the Party so refusing to be banished; until he *satisfy* the Forfeiture by him so committed or the Party so offended

XIX Item. It is ordered, That the Forfeitures above said shall be equally divided, the one Moiety thereof to be paid to the Use of the Poor of the Parish, and the other Moiety to be distributed and disposed of, as the Master of the Pit shall think fit, unto such Feeders and Ancient Breeders of Cocks as are or shall be decayed

APPENDIX B

The following "General Rules and Orders for Cocking" are given in the 1808 edition of Hoyle's *Games*. It is not possible to say when the Rules received this, their final, shape, but the references to the "setters-to" indicate the latter part of the eighteenth century. It will be remarked that these Rules define with far greater precision and minuteness the manner in which cocks were to be fought and handled than the Code of Rules published in the *Racing Calendar* of 1751. It will also be observed that there are no provisions concerning the seating and conduct of spectators, that the old Rules about wagering are condensed and simplified into a single law, and that there is no mention of the "basket" as a punishment for defaulters. All these things point to the extreme likelihood that this Code of Rules and Orders is referable to 1780–1800, or thereabout. At the same time it will be observed they include provisions which were in force during Charles II's reign, as has been shown by the extracts from Pepys's Diary on pages 36-7 :—

On the weighing morning, that person whose chance is to weigh last, is to set his cocks and number his pens both main and byes, and leave the key of the pens on the weighing table (or, the other party may put a lock on the door) before any cock is put into the scale; and after the first pack of cocks is weighed, a person appointed by him that weighed first shall go into the other pen to see that no other cocks are weighed but what are so set and numbered, provided they are within the articles of weight that the match

specifies; if not to take the following cock or cocks until the whole number of main and bye cocks are weighed through

After they are all weighed, proceed as soon as possible to match them, beginning at the least weight first and so on; and equal weights or nearest weights to be separated provided by that separation a greater number of battles can be made; all blanks, that is choice of cocks, are to be filled up on the weighing day, and the battles divided and struck off for each day's play, as agreed on, and the cocks that weigh the least are to fight the first day, and so upwards

At the time agreed on by both parties, the cocks that are to fight the first battle are brought upon the pit by the feeders or their keepers; and after being examined to see whether they answer the marks and colours specified in the match-bill, they are given to the setters-to who, after chopping them in hand, give them to the gentlemen who are called masters of the match (who always sit opposite to each other), when they turn them down on the mat; and the setters-to are not to touch them unless they either hang in the mats, in each other, or get close to the edge of the pit, until they have left off fighting, while a person can tell forty

When both cocks leave off fighting, until one of the setters-to or a person appointed for telling the law can tell forty gradually; then the setters-to are to make the nearest way to their cocks, and, as soon as they have taken them up, to carry them to the middle of the pit and immediately deliver them on their legs beak to beak and not touch them any more until they have refused fighting, so long as the teller of the law can tell ten, without they are on their backs or hung in each other, or on the mat; then they are to set-to again in the same manner as before, and continue it till one cock refuses fighting ten several times, one

after another,* when it is that cock's battle that fought within the law

But it sometimes happens that both cocks refuse fighting while the law is telling; when this happens, a fresh cock is to be hovelled, and brought upon the mat as soon as possible, and the setters-to are to toss up which cock is to be set-to first, and he that gets the chance is to choose. Then the cock who is to be set-to last must be taken up, but not carried off the pit; next setting the hovelled cock down to the other, five separate times, telling ten between each setting-to, and then the same to that which had been taken up; and if one fights and the other refuses, it is a battle to the fighting cock; but if both fight or both refuse it is a drawn battle. The reason of setting-to five times to each cock is, that the times setting-to being the long law or on their both refusing, the law is to be equally divided between them as they are both entitled to it alike

Another way of deciding a battle is, if any person offers to lay £10 to a crown and no person takes it until the law teller tells forty and calls out three separate times "will any one take it?" and if no one does, it is the cock's battle the odds are laid on, and the setters-to are not to touch the cocks during the time the forty is telling, without either cock is hung in the mat, or on his back, or hung together†

If a cock should die before the long law is told out, although he fought in the law and the other did not, he loses his battle; for there cannot be a better rule for a cock winning his battle than killing his adversary in the limited time he is entitled to by cock laws

There are frequently disputes in setting-to in the long law, for often both cocks refuse fighting until four or

* This was called the "long law"

† This was called the "short law"

five, or more or less times, are told; then they sometimes begin telling from that cock's fighting, and counting but once refused, but they should continue their number on, until one cock has refused ten times; for when the law is begun to be told, it is for both cocks; and if one cock fights within the long law and the other not, it is a battle to the cock that fought, counting from the first setting-to

All disputes about bets, or the battle being won or lost, ought to be decided by the spectators, for if the bets are not paid nor the battles settled according to the judgment then given, it will be a good evidence in law if an action is brought for the recovery of such bets

The crowing and mantling of a cock, or fighting at the setter-to's hand before he is put to the other cock, or breaking from his antagonist is allowed as no fight

APPENDIX C

The "Match Bill" was a list of each cocker's birds filled in by the person who weighed them; it was in this form:—

	A. B.'s Cocks	C. D.'s Cocks
Lbs. 3; ozs. 6	1	1
	2	2
	3	3
Lbs. 3; ozs. 7	1	1
	2	2
	3	3

and so on up to 4 lbs. 8 ozs., which was the maximum weight under Cock-pit Royal Rules

Each bird was minutely described and his description written in what was known as "Cocker's Short hand" against his weight. The following is an example of "Cocker's Short hand"*:—

1. Phst. B. Bir. yel. hi. co. clt. ylgs. 4 hd. m n'ls wts. 3 lbs. 3 oz. 1 gr.

Which means—

"Pheasant breasted Birchen yellow, high comb, clear cut, yellow legs, fours in head (*i.e.*, owner's marks in both eyelids and nostrils), middle nails whitest: weight 3 lbs. 3 ozs. 1 grain"

All provincial names were ignored at the Royal Cock-pit, and the birds were described in proper colour terms, invariably beginning with the breast, as it was never trimmed

* *Life and Letters of John Harris, the Cornish Cocker.* Privately Printed. (1910)

In the north of England cocks were described in a very slipshod manner, thus—

14. Voltigeur red. 3. 4. Parker,

being the number of the cock's pen, name of the bird, a very general note of his colour, his weight in pounds and ounces, and lastly the feeder's name

There were men who made, or augmented, their incomes, by attending the cock-pits and taking down for patrons the marks and colours of the birds brought to the scales. It was not infrequently done by clergymen who, as breeders of game fowl themselves, were conversant with technical terms and colours

APPENDIX D

Mr. Hackwood* gives the following rules, which regulated inter-county and other important matches in the last days of cock fighting :—

Rule I. The pit shall be circular, 12 feet diameter and 18 inches high, the floor to be covered with carpet and a match made in the middle of the pit

Rule II. The cockers, or pitters, shall each choose a judge who shall choose another, whose decisions on all questions of fighting and bets shall be final

Rule III. All cocks to be weighed before being pitted, unless in a catch-weight fight: and no bird must be handled after fairly delivered unless on permission of the referee

Rule IV. When a cock is fast in his adversary the owner shall draw the spurs out but not hold him any longer than is necessary for releasing him

Rule V. If after the cocks have been pitted, they refuse to fight while the pitters count ten times ten or a hundred, a fresh bird must be pitted and the owners must toss which bird is to fight, the winner to have choice. The odd bird must be taken up, but not away from the pit. If these two refuse it is a drawn battle, but if one strike he is the winner

Rule VI. No pitter shall be permitted during a fight to clean his bird's beak or eyes or press him against the floor, or squeeze him to make him fight

**Old English Sports.* By F. W. Hackwood. (1907)

Rule VII. If a cock be disabled by a broken leg or blindness from continuing to fight, the pitters shall place the birds beak to beak, and if the disabled bird does strike the game is won

Rule VIII. The crowing of a cock is not fighting, nor is breaking away from his adversary fighting

Rule IX. In all cases of appeal, fighting shall cease until the referee gives his decision, which shall be strictly to the question and final; the birds not to be taken out of the pit, nor the spurs taken off till the match is settled

Rule X. Any pitter guilty of using unlawful means to force his bird to fight, such as pinching him or pricking him, shall lose the battle

Rule XI. The highest number of battles won to decide the main

Rule XII. All bets must stand unless declared off by consent of both parties

APPENDIX E

ARTICLES FOR A COCK MATCH

AS MADE USE OF AT THE

COCK-PIT ROYAL, WESTMINSTER*

Articles of Agreement made the.....day of..... one thousand eight hundred and.....between..... and..... First, the said parties have agreed that each of them shall produce, shew and weigh at the .....on the.....day of.....beginning at the hour of.....in morning.....cocks, none to be less than three pounds six ounces, nor more than four pounds eight ounces, and as many of each party's cocks that come within one ounce of each other shall fight for... .... a battle, that is .....each cock: in as equal divisions as the battles can be divided into six pits, or day's play at the cock-pit before mentioned: and the party's cocks that win the greatest number of battles matched out of the number before specified shall be entitled to the sum of ..... odd battle money, and the sum to be staked into the hands of Mr..... before any cocks are pitted by both parties. And we further agree to produce, shew and weigh on the said weighing days.....cock for bye battles, subject to the same weight as cocks that fight in the main, and these to be added to the number of main cocks unmatched, and as many of them as come within one ounce of each other shall fight for... .....a battle; the number of cocks so matched, to be equally divided as will permit of, and added to each day's play with the main cocks;

* *From Directions for Breeding Game Cocks.* New Edition. (1818)

and it is also agreed that the balance of the battle money shall be paid at the end of each day's play. It is also further agreed for the cock to fight in silver spurs and with fair hackles, and to be subject to all the usual rules of cock-fighting as practised at the Cock-pit Royal, Westminster, and the profits arising from the spectators to be equally divided between both parties, after all charges are paid that usually happen on these occasions. Witness our hands the

day of 18

Witness.

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